British Birds

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(Part 3)

Opportunities for co-operation with French ornithologists
Guy Mountfort

Three Shillings

April 1960

British Birds

AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY JOURNAL

Edited by
P. A. D. Hollom E. M. Nicholson
I. J. Ferguson-Lees Stanley Cramp
Photographic Editor: Eric Hosking
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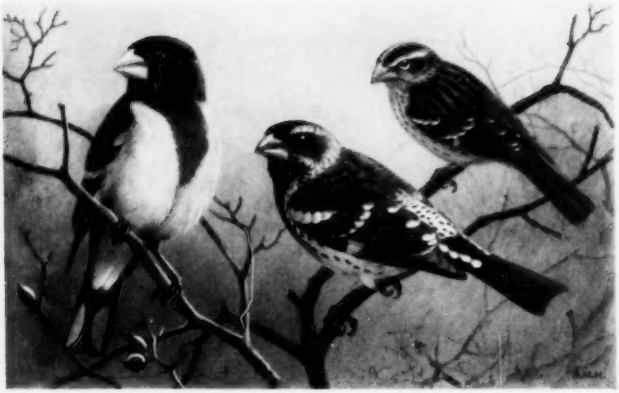
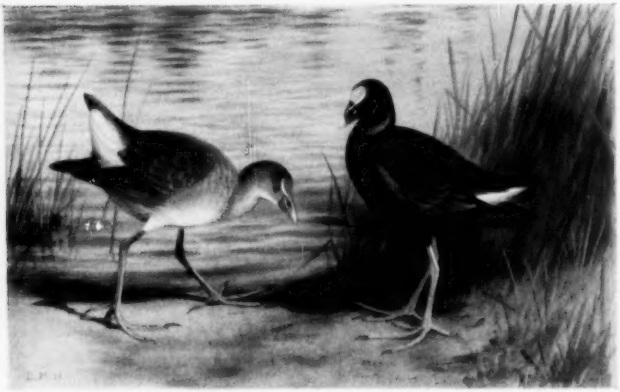


Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*), male summer and winter, and female. First European record, Co. Antrim, 24th November 1957



American Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrula martinica*), young and adult. First European record, Isles of Scilly, 7th November 1958

Painted by D. M. Reid-Henry for the forthcoming *Popular Handbook of Rarer British Birds* by P. A. D. Hollom

PLATE I

British Birds

VOL. 53 NO. 4
APRIL 1960

American Purple Gallinule in the Isles of Scilly: a bird new to Britain and Europe

A STRANGE BIRD, in size and shape not unlike a Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) though with rather longer legs and feet, was picked up in an exhausted state in the gutter of the High Street, Hugh Town, St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly, late in the evening of 7th November 1958. It was bronze-green above and buff below, with white under tail-coverts; its legs and feet were dull orange-yellow, its iris was light brown, its bill was yellowish-green with reddish-brown at the base, and it had a dull green facial shield.

The finder was Miss Margaret Hughes, on her way to night duty at the telephone exchange. She took the bird with her and it remained at the exchange until the following evening when P. Z. Mackenzie, a local ornithologist, was contacted. He soon realised that it was a species of gallinule not described in the European bird-books. Taking it home, he fed it on earthworms which it ate avidly, but it was in too emaciated a condition and died on the 9th. The corpse was sent to J. L. F. Parslow in London, where it was identified as an immature American Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrula martinica*). The specimen is now preserved at the British Museum (Natural History) (Regd. No. 1958/27/1). Mr. Parslow has supplied the following description and measurements:

Upper-parts: crown and nape tawny-brown; hind-neck partly washed olive, becoming completely olive on lower neck; mantle and long scapulars brownish-olive, becoming olive-brown on lower back; rump rich dark brown with nigger brown tips to the feathers, these forming longitudinal streakings; upper tail-coverts and rectrices brown, rather lighter than rump, with faint olive wash. *Under-parts:* sides of head ashy-buff, becoming tawny-buff on sides of neck and olive-buff on sides of breast; chin and throat off-white; under tail-coverts white; rest of under-parts creamy-buff, lighter on belly, darker and faintly washed olive on breast, and warmer on thighs. *Wings:* primaries black-brown on inner webs and olive-green on outer (except silver-grey narrow outer web to first primary); secondaries olive-brown; coverts mainly brownish-olive,

but bluish-green on primary coverts and some lesser coverts, becoming turquoise on a few feathers near carpal; under wing-coverts slate-grey tinged olive on outer coverts and tipped white; axillaries slate tinged with brown. *Measurements:* wing 173 mm., tail 67 mm., tarsus 60 mm., middle toe (excluding claw) 63 mm. *Wing-formula:* 2nd primary longest, 1st 21 mm. shorter, 3rd 3 mm. shorter, 4th 11 mm. shorter, 5th 20 mm. shorter.

This is the first record of the American Purple Gallinule in Europe and it is also, incidentally, the furthest north it has ever been reported (see notes by Dr. I. C. T. Nisbet, below). It should be added that this bird bears little resemblance to the European Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) which belongs to a different genus and is much larger.

Notes on the American Purple Gallinule*

By I. C. T. Nisbet

NO ONE WHO STUDIES the birds of remote oceanic islands can fail to be struck by the curious preponderance among their land-birds of members of the family Rallidae—the rails, crakes and gallinules. Most sizable island groups have endemic species or subspecies, and the family is always well represented in the lists of lost vagrants. Evidently these birds, despite their weak-winged appearance and specialised habits, have great powers of long-distance flight and a great facility for adapting themselves to new environments.

It is thus not surprising that several rails should have succeeded in crossing the Atlantic: the Corncrake (*Crex crex*) has been recorded at least fifteen times in North America (Peterson 1947), the Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*) has recently occurred in the Lesser Antilles (Voous 1957), and the Spotted Crake's American representative, the Sora (*P. carolina*) has reached Great Britain on five occasions (Witherby *et al.* 1941). But the latest addition to this list—the American Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrula martinica*) which was found dying in the gutter on St. Mary's in the Isles of Scilly on 7th November 1958 (see pages 145-146)—is somewhat astonishing, for this is a subtropical species which (at least in November) lives almost entirely south of the zone of westerly winds in the Atlantic. The Scilly record was not only the first for the Old World, but was actually the most northerly record of the species!

*These notes on the American Purple Gallinule, and also those on the Rose-breasted Grosbeak which follow the Irish record of that species later in this issue (pages 150-152), have been written by Dr. Nisbet at our special request as an accompaniment to the two paintings by D. M. Reid-Henry now reproduced in colour as plate I.—EDS.

The American Purple Gallinule breeds in the southern and south-eastern United States, north to about latitude 32° in South Carolina, and south through Mexico and the Caribbean to tropical South America. The northern birds are long-distance migrants, and only a handful remains in the United States for the winter, usually in the extreme south of Florida and Texas. This is one of a group of species which migrates directly across the width of the Gulf of Mexico (Stevenson 1957), and its migration is occasionally disrupted there by local cyclonic storms; when these lows move north up the east coast of the United States Purple Gallinules are often brought with them (Griscom and Snyder 1955; Bagg 1957). The species is nowadays recorded almost every year in New England and Bermuda, and has even reached Newfoundland, more than 1,000 miles north of its breeding range (Peters and Burleigh 1951).

For this reason it is tempting to relate the Scilly record to a storm in the Gulf of Mexico a few days earlier, the only one which had brushed the range of the species for some weeks. This storm crossed the Georgia coast during the night of 1st-2nd November, and moved north-east to blow itself out in the Atlantic on the 4th-5th: if the gallinule was carried out to sea with the low pressure centre it must then have crossed a calm area in mid-Atlantic before meeting a moderate south-westerly airflow, in which it could have reached Britain in about two more days. Thus if the bird was newly arrived when it was found on the 7th (and its moribund condition suggests that it had not been there long) its arrival fits in well with the weather pattern in the Atlantic, suggesting that it had spent at least five days on the crossing—presumably without obtaining food or water on the way. This astonishing feat is much superior to that normally considered possible for Passerines making long sea-crossings (Lack 1959), and may help to explain why rails so frequently reach remote islands where other land-birds are rare. In this connection it should be mentioned that the Purple Gallinule is nowadays recorded almost regularly on Tristan da Cunha, over 2,000 miles from the nearest part of its range in South America (Elliott 1957).

The American Purple Gallinule is about the size of a Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), and sufficiently similar in shape and habits to be easily confused with that species when distance or poor light obscure the colour distinctions. The adult, however, is a vividly coloured bird, bright purple on the head and under-parts and brilliant bronze above, with white under tail-coverts, a bright red bill tipped with yellow, and a pale blue "shield" on the forehead. Immature birds are more like young Moorhens, having brown heads, whitish under-parts and bronzy-brown backs, but they have pure white under tail-coverts and lack the white stripe on the flanks (see Hollom 1960 for other distinctions). The legs are bright yellow at all ages, and the

grotesquely long toes are often striking as the birds walk—with surprising grace and stealth—over floating vegetation, constantly cocking up their tails to display the white undersides.

This bird inhabits a wide variety of fresh-water marshes, from forest-ringed lakes in the tropics to rice-fields in the southern United States, but it is particularly associated with places where lily-pads or other plants form a carpet of vegetation floating on the surface of shallow pools. One of its most characteristic feeding habits is to roll up the leaves of these plants—with deft movements of its foot and bill—to reach snails or other molluscs on the undersides. In these marshes life at water level is often hazardous, however, and the species is much eaten by alligators, as any who have seen Walt Disney's film *Prowlers of the Everglades* will recall. It is perhaps for this reason that it spends much of its life above their reach, perching and resting in bushes and raising its nest several feet above water level. Indeed, much of its food is obtained in bushes and trees: in the southern United States it sometimes climbs rice stems to feed on the seed-heads (Pough 1951), and in the West Indies even climbs trees to feed on plantains and bananas (Wells 1902). According to Howell (1932), the food of those in North America is more or less equally divided between vegetable and animal items, and a similarly varied diet is recorded in the tropics (Gross and Van Tyne 1929). Parrot-like, it often lifts its food to its bill in its feet, and the feet are also used dexterously in the construction of the nest.

Nests are usually on floating islands and are sometimes built up as much as six feet above the surface of the vegetation; the birds commonly arch them over by weaving together the tops of the surrounding plants. The nest itself is loosely constructed of dried grass, reed stems and the like, and is often surrounded by a number of half-completed trial nests (Wayne 1910). One studied by Gross and Van Tyne (1929) in the Panama Canal Zone was notable for having a long woven "runway" extending for several feet down from it and up to a specially constructed platform near-by. The birds would run to this platform when disturbed and they could take flight easily from it despite the surrounding vegetation. The usual clutch-size in the United States is six to eight eggs, but Gross and Van Tyne's tropical nest held only four. The young hatch in 22-25 days and leave the nest within 24 hours, swimming freely and climbing well with the aid of a well-developed hook on their wings.

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Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Co. Antrim: a bird new to Ireland and Europe

A ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*)—a North American species not previously recorded in Great Britain or Ireland—was seen at Shane's Castle, Co. Antrim, on 24th November 1957, and recorded in the *Irish Bird Report* for 1957 (pp. 21-22). It was an adult male and the observers, Messrs. H. Dick and A. J. Tree, have provided the following particulars:

> Head, throat and upper-parts black, the last seeming to be tinged with brown. Rump and large part of tail white, rest of tail black. Breast bright red and most conspicuous; rest of under-parts white. Wings barred black and white, very striking in flight. Bill shortish and stout, appeared whitish.
>
> Size about that of a Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*). When perched it gave a very full-breasted appearance. It was extremely wild and the plumage showed no heavy wear or damage. It was essentially a black and white bird with a conspicuous white rump area and a red breast. It was seen perched at 30 feet and in flight from 30 to 60 feet.

As a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was exhibited in the National Cage Birds Show at Olympia in London in January 1958, the question of importation and possible escape has naturally been given particular attention. We have been in touch with several aviculturalists and in particular Mr. R. C. J. Sawyer who is acknowledged to have an unrivalled knowledge of North American cage birds in this country. Writing in August 1958 he was good enough to tell us, "The Rose-breasted Grosbeak has only been imported a year ago for the first

time since pre-war days, and I had the handling of that consignment." After stating the whereabouts of the seven birds concerned he added, "I am quite sure that these are the only living specimens in this country and none of these have escaped".

The plumage description above might seem more appropriate to a male in spring than in autumn, which led us to consult Dr. Charles Vaurie, Assistant Curator of the American Museum of Natural History, New York. He kindly examined the series of skins there and wrote, "The Rose-breasted Grosbeak is one of our most individually variable species, so it is possible to find a November bird without brown mottlings below, though it would be unusual. Birds at this time of the year have brownish edges to the feathers of the back which would account for the statement from your correspondent that "the upper-parts seemed tinged with brown".

Notes on the Rose-breasted Grosbeak

By I. C. T. Nisbet

DESPITE THE SIMILARITY of its name, the Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) is a very different bird from the Scarlet Grosbeak (*Carpodacus erythrinus*) and Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*), which are familiar—at least vicariously—to the European bird-watcher. Its natural habitat is the deciduous woodland of eastern North America, and the male in Co. Antrim in November 1957 (see pages 149-150) was the first of the species to be recorded in Europe. About the size of a small thrush, the male is a striking bird in breeding plumage, being black and white with a patch of brilliant rosy red on its breast. The female is dull brown, with dark streaks on its back and under-parts, but it is readily identified by its huge deep bill, striking white stripes on its head and its double white wing-bar. In winter the males remain black and white on the wings and tail, but the body plumage usually becomes streaky brown like that of the females; only a few retain as much of the breeding plumage as the one seen in Antrim. The birds have large heads and plump bodies, and though active when feeding they slink through the trees and bushes in a peculiarly furtive way, so that they would be very unobtrusive but for their constantly uttered note, a distinctive, sharp "keek". The male has an attractive mellow song, consisting of short warbled phrases which are somewhat reminiscent of the more melodious *Sylvia* warblers.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak breeds north to about latitude 47° in eastern Canada, including Nova Scotia and New Brunswick but not Newfoundland, and south to the central United States. In the west its range is bounded by the treeless parts of the Great Plains, but beyond these, in the mountains of western North America, there

breeds a closely-related form, the Black-headed Grosbeak [*Ph. (l.) melanocephalus*]. The two forms meet in the narrow zones of riparian woodland along the rivers which intersect the Great Plains, and here they hybridise freely, with the result that many ornithologists now regard them as conspecific, although the males in particular look very different. A similar situation is found in several other arboreal birds in this part of North America—e.g. in the "orioles" (*Icterus*) and "buntings" (*Passerina*)—and is paralleled in the Old World by the Black-headed and Red-headed Buntings (*Emberiza melanocephala* and *bruniceps*), which interbreed where their ranges meet in Iran (Paludan 1940). Analysis of such hybridisation is of great importance in the study of speciation (Sibley and Short 1959, Sibley and West 1959).

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak winters in northern South America and in parts of central America, which it reaches by a long flight over the Gulf of Mexico (Lowery 1945, Stevenson 1957). In the spring, indeed, it is one of the most conspicuous of such trans-Gulf migrants, because it is one of the earliest, and thus it often runs into the last of the strong cold fronts which sweep across this area during the winter months; these bring cold northerly winds and rain, which during April often precipitate spectacular numbers of birds on to the northern coast of the Gulf (Lowery 1945, Bagg 1956). Another interesting feature of this early spring migration is that the first falls of migrants in the southern United States are often matched by simultaneous arrivals far to the north-east, i.e. in New England where the bulk of the population does not normally appear until several weeks later. Bagg (1955, 1956, 1958), who studied the phenomenon particularly in the Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*), showed that this prolongation of migration coincides with strong following winds, and concluded that the birds involved cross the Gulf of Mexico and Florida without stopping, and then continue north-east over the Atlantic until they reach a landfall in New England or Nova Scotia—more than 2,000 miles from their starting-point in central America! It is not surprising that a bird capable of such a flight, and adapted to a sea-crossing of over 600 miles as part of its normal migration, should be able to cross the Atlantic in favourable circumstances.

In the breeding-season this species lives in deciduous woodland, being particularly fond of edge habitats where fairly large trees adjoin open ground more or less grown up with bushes. It is probably most abundant in tangled shrubbery along streams or around the edges of woodland swamps, but it also occurs commonly in second-growth woodland, and in some areas breeds in parks, suburban gardens and orchards. Its food is obtained largely in trees, and in the United States consists of roughly equal proportions of vegetable and animal matter (McAtee 1908). Berries, wild fruit and various seeds are eaten

more or less as they become available, and the birds also take a wide variety of insects, showing a special preference for larvae and adults of the Colorado Beetle (*Leptinotarsa decemlineata*).

The most detailed account of the nesting of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak was based on semi-captive birds (Ivor 1944), but the Black-headed form has been studied in detail by Weston (1947), and other accounts of the breeding of eastern birds (Allen 1916, Forbush 1929, Roberts 1936, Todd 1940) are all substantially similar in detail. The males are territorial, but apart from occasional fights in the presence of females they seem to have no striking displays except for a song-flight in early spring. This lack of conspicuous display, although apparently well authenticated, is surprising in such a brightly-coloured bird. The nest, built by the female, is a loose and bulky structure, made of small twigs, plant stems and rootlets, and is most commonly placed between 6 and 15 feet from the ground. The clutch usually consists of three or four eggs, but clutches of five are quite often found in the eastern United States and six have been recorded occasionally. Both sexes incubate, and the male in particular sings freely while on the nest; the incubation period has variously been recorded as 12 days (Weston), 12-13 days (Ivor) and 14 days (Forbush, Todd). Only one brood is produced each year, and the birds migrate south early; only stragglers are left in the breeding areas by late September.

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Report on rare birds in Great Britain and Ireland in 1958

Compiled by G. A. Pyman
on behalf of the Rarity Records Committee

THE FORMATION of a Rarity Records Committee, with expanded numbers, knowledge and functions to take the place of the vetting process formerly operated by this journal, was announced in August 1959 (*Brit. Birds,* 52: 241-244). With the co-operation of regional organisations, it aims to cope with the enormously increased number of observations of rare birds at a national level, so that these are assessed uniformly and not by the inevitably varying standards of the different county reports alone, and more particularly to bring together all the well-authenticated records in one place so that the general picture emerges. Each individual record of a rare bird has comparatively little value on its own, but when all are taken together they may act as pointers to the origins of drift and other migratory movements, while at the same time illustrating trends in range-expansion and such aspects of behaviour as the differences between the wanderings of adult and first-year birds. Twenty or even ten years ago such a general picture would have meant little because it could only have been of the sketchiest nature. These days, however, the much larger band of competent bird-watchers skilled in the considerable advances that have taken place in the art of field-identification, and not least the huge increase in observatory and trapping techniques, are now producing an annual flow of information on a scale which makes for a new and clearer appreciation of many problems.

Several birds which were formerly regarded as very rare vagrants are now found to be annual visitors in small numbers. One of these is the Melodious Warbler (*Hippolais polyglotta*) of which nearly five times as many as the pre-war grand total were recorded in 1958 alone (see page 169). This species, together with the closely related Icterine Warbler (*H. icterina*) which so nearly replaces it geographically, does in fact provide an interesting example of the pattern which begins to emerge when all the records are brought together (see page 170); and it is to further this aim of presenting the complete general picture that we have included a number of observations which clearly refer to one of these two warblers although specific identification was not possible. To exclude such observations because these two species happen to be very similar and comparatively difficult to separate in the field would be to distort their picture in relation to that of the other

warblers. A similar case is provided by the two dowitchers (*Limnodromus griseus* and *scolopaceus*), but otherwise we are of course only publishing records which we consider to be certain. There is no value in the inclusion of "probables" in square brackets (as is still so often done in some reports).

These, then, were the main aims behind the formation of this Committee, but another benefit has quickly become apparent. The bringing together and comparison of various detailed descriptions, followed by examination of museum skins and consultation with people who have special experience of the species concerned, is leading to a thorough reappraisal of the identification criteria of some groups. Such results will be published from time to time in this journal: the first, a paper on the field-identification of the marsh terns (*Chlidonias* spp.) in autumn and winter plumages, will be appearing shortly. The members of the Committee find themselves learning all the time and feel that the passing on of such information will not be the least of the values of their work.

The editors felt that there was a need for such a body as this, consisting of people who between them have first-hand field experience of the vast majority of the species likely to occur here; and that this feeling was general is apparent from the almost complete co-operation that the Committee now enjoys from editors of regional reports and from observatory wardens. At its annual conference in Oxford in January the Bird Observatories Committee agreed unanimously to give us its fullest support over the great volume of records from the ever-increasing network of regularly manned observation points.

As originally constituted (in June 1959) the Committee consisted of P. A. D. Hollom (Chairman), G. A. Pyman (Hon. Secretary), H. G. Alexander, I. J. Ferguson-Lees, D. D. Harber, A. Hazelwood, H. P. Medhurst, Prof. M. F. M. Meiklejohn, Major R. F. Ruttledge (Irish records only) and Kenneth Williamson. In November 1959, however, H. P. Medhurst had to resign upon taking up a post in Aden and Dr. I. C. T. Nisbet, recently returned from America, took his place (*Brit. Birds*, 53: 3). Then in early January 1960 H. G. Alexander also went abroad, probably for about a year, and the loss of his vast knowledge gained in many parts of the world was deeply felt, even though it is probably only temporary. In his place, however, we were very glad to welcome K. D. Smith, who has had many years' experience of Palearctic migrants in Africa.

While dealing with observations for 1959 as they came in, the Committee's first task was to consider the 1958 records of the species listed in the original announcement and of certain well-defined races of equal rarity. Details have so far been obtained of all but 16 of the 360 or so records for that year known to the editors of *British Birds*, *Scottish Birds*, *Nature in Wales*, *The Irish Bird Report* and the various

English county reports or to the wardens of the bird observatories. About 27 of these records are still under consideration, but it may be some weeks before the last of them is cleared and it is felt that publication of this report should not be further delayed on their account. Such of these remaining 1958 records as are accepted will instead be published later this year in the next report which will otherwise deal with 1959 records.

In this, our first report, it may be helpful if we mention some of the principles by which we have been guided. First and foremost, we have made every effort to obtain full details of each occurrence including, where possible, not only a description of the bird but also an account of the conditions in which it was seen. In this connection we should like to draw attention to the editorial on this subject published in 1952 (*Brit. Birds*, 45: 1-2). There it was emphasised that notes taken on the spot and before a book has been consulted are the only ones of real value, and that these should also include details of distance, light, the nature of the ground and whether other species were actually present for comparison. Experience in checking these records is of considerable assistance in recognising a genuine field-description as against one that has been touched up after reference to books. We hope that this will be borne in mind because it is the aim of this Committee to raise the already high standard of sight records still higher. At the same time we consider the possession of some knowledge of an observer's reliability to be almost as important as the account of the observation itself. Consequently, unless people are known to at least one member of the Committee, we have taken steps to find out what experience of identification they have had. In addition, we have taken into account any factors which indirectly support a record, including in some cases the weather conditions and in others the simultaneous appearance of the same species (or ones of similar range) elsewhere in Great Britain and Ireland or adjacent parts of the Continent. Finally, each observation is considered on its merits and, although no record is accepted unless the regional organisation is in agreement or has at least been consulted, we have not been influenced by considerations that are purely local: in some areas, for example, it is the practice of the regional editors automatically to reject a first county record which does not have the support of a second observer.

The procedure we adopt has developed as we have gained experience. Records are sent round by post and only those which on first circulation are rejected by a majority of the Committee are immediately "out". If more than half the members are in favour of acceptance the relevant documents are sent back to the minority for further consideration. Depending on these further comments, the record may then be circulated once again round the whole Committee for a final decision,

often after additional information has been obtained from the observer. If at the end only one member of the Committee does not accept the record, then he is overruled, but if the observation is rejected by two or more it is discarded. We hope that by these systems very few bad records are accepted and a minimum of good ones turned down. No records committee is infallible and undoubtedly some correct identifications are rejected, not because we necessarily think them wrong, but because we consider the evidence insufficient and because it is better that some good records should go than that a number of dubious ones should be admitted.

Close liaison is maintained with the Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union whose function it is to adjudicate upon first records for Great Britain and Ireland. No record rejected by that B.O.U. Committee will be published by us, even if we consider it acceptable. So far as 1958 is concerned, the two records in this category to have been cleared by us—the American Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrula martinica*) and the Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*)—have been accepted by both bodies, while one other is still under consideration.

It has been somewhat disturbing to find what a large number of 1958 records had been accepted by regional organisations on the flimsiest of evidence or, indeed, in the complete absence of supporting details in some cases. The need for a full account of each observation cannot be stressed too much. In 1958 there were several records which were accepted locally without the descriptions being checked and which proved to have serious flaws when considered by this Committee—flaws which, had they been known, would undoubtedly have resulted in the rejection of these records by the county referees concerned.

We do not propose to mention here the records in 1958 county reports which we consider to be unacceptable. However, for the sake of the completeness of this journal, we are listing below a number of claimed occurrences for that year which appeared in the "Recent reports and news" feature and which we are now unable to accept after full consideration of the available details:

Little Bittern	Yare valley, Norfolk, 7th May (*Brit. Birds*, 51: 250)
	Cley, Norfolk, 26th August (51: 362)
Kite	North Walsham, Norfolk, 3rd March (51: 207)
	Kelling, Norfolk, 22nd March (51: 164)
	Woodbastwick, Norfolk, 26th May (51: 280)
White-tailed Eagle	Unst, Shetland, 8th July (51: 317)
Crane	Staines Common, Middlesex, 15th-16th March (51: 164)
	Saltwood, Kent, 5th April (51: 207)
	Midrips/Rye, Sussex, 7th April (51: 320)
	Dunwich/Walberswick, Suffolk, 21st and 25th May (51: 278)

Killdeer	Cley, Norfolk, 1st December (51: 528)
Great Snipe	Cley, Norfolk, 9th April (51: 207)
Hudsonian Whimbrel	Dublin Bay, Co. Dublin, 8th December (52: 32)
Black-winged Stilt	Thornham, Norfolk, 31st August (51: 363)
Cream-coloured Courser	Par Beach, Cornwall, 16th May (51: 278)
Mediterranean Black-headed Gull	Salthouse, Norfolk, 30th November (51: 530)
White-winged Black Tern	Blythburgh, Suffolk, 30th August (51: 363)
Roller	Mid Yell, Shetland, 5th September (51: 439)
	St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly, 22nd September (51: 439)
	Bamburgh, Northumberland, 24th September (51: 439)
Crested Lark	Dungeness, Kent, 24th November (two) (51: 530)
Black-eared Wheatear	Portland Bill, Dorset, 18th August (51: 362)
Marsh Warbler	Great Saltee, Co. Wexford, 1st September (51: 437)
Aquatic Warbler	Yalding, Kent, 31st August (two) (51: 362)
Arctic Warbler	Sands of Forvie, Aberdeenshire, 2nd September (51: 437)
Yellow-browed Warbler	Burn Halt, near Tiverton, Devon, 7th-8th April (51: 319)
Lesser Grey Shrike	Dartford, Kent, 7th May (51: 250)
Rustic Bunting	Cannock Reservoir, Staffordshire, 17th August (51: 362)
Little Bunting	Shellness, Sheppey, Kent, 13th September (51: 434)
	Shellness, Sheppey, Kent, 12th October (three) (51: 429)

It is likely that there will be several additions to this list after the outstanding 1958 records that were mentioned earlier have been finally considered.

As was announced in the original editorial in August 1959, species and some well-defined races which have been recorded not more than ten times in Great Britain and Ireland, as well as ones which have not been recorded at all during the previous 25 years, are still being published with full descriptions in this journal. Such birds are mentioned only briefly in the systematic list which follows, but have a cross-reference to the fuller publication. In a very few of these cases the record was accepted by the editors of *British Birds* before the formation of this Committee: such records have not been reconsidered by the Committee. The basic details given for each record in the list are (1) county; (2) locality; (3) number of birds *if more than one*, together with age and/or sex where established; (4) whether trapped or if dead; (5) date or extreme dates; and (6) observer or observers. With regard to the last, some birds were seen by many people and in such cases we have put the names of not more than three, with an indication that others were involved. Other relevant information and comments—for example, on the question of escapes from captivity—are included where necessary in a separate paragraph under the species concerned. In distant parts of the world there are certain species which would be very difficult to separate in the field from ones on the British list: in these cases we accept the record, but state below that the details do not rule out the other (usually extremely remote) possibility.

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In accordance with the policy of the editors of *British Birds*, the nomenclature and classification throughout the systematic list is that given in the B.O.U. *Check-list of the Birds of Great Britain and Ireland* (1952), with the amendments proposed by the B.O.U. Taxonomic Committee in 1955 (see *Ibis*, 98: 157-168). In the case of sight-records of subspecies, however—in which category we also include birds trapped and released—we normally give these only as "showing the characters" of the race concerned, since determinations of this kind are primarily a matter for the museum worker able to compare his birds with a range of skins.

In conclusion, we should like to express our sincere appreciation of the co-operation shown by the great majority of local organisations and individual observers alike in producing original documents, dealing with innumerable queries and assisting in divers other directions. It is hoped to produce the 1959 report before the end of the year and thereafter one annually in the middle of the year. These aims will only be possible, however, if we receive any outstanding 1959 records now and if, in future, full details of each observation are sent to the editorial address in Bedford (or to K. Williamson in the case of the observatories) as soon as possible after the event.

In the early, exploratory stages our progress has sometimes been held up by delays in receiving information and also by the sheer mass of papers involved in considering two years' records in our first six months of existence. We hope that the publication of this first report will justify, and indeed strengthen, the confidence already shown in this Committee, and that a smoother and speedier flow and exchange of records will enable us to be of increasing help to both observers and regional editors. Their support is vital to the success of our efforts.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF 1958 RECORDS ACCEPTED

Little Shearwater (*Procellaria baroli*)

Cheshire: near Stockport, moribund ♀ of Madeiran race *P. b. baroli*, 10th May; now preserved in the Bolton Museum, Lancashire (*Brit. Birds*, 51: 354-355).

Cory's Shearwater (*Procellaria diomedea*)

Co. Wexford: Great Saltee, single birds, 2nd and 4th September (J. J. M. Flegg, D. F. Musson)

Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)

Essex: Walthamstow Reservoirs, adult, 25th May (J. Fitzpatrick).

Hertfordshire: Wilstone Reservoir, Tring, immature, 30th July-15th August (H. Cole, Mrs. S. Cowdy, R. S. R. Fitter *et al.*).

Kent: Stoke, immature, 2nd and 10th August (E. H. Gillham, G. Lambourn, C. A. Walker *et al.*).

Sussex: Chichester gravel-pits, 18th May (L. P. Alder); Rye Harbour gravel-pits, 18th June (D. D. Harber).

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Cornwall: Hayle Estuary, 8th-18th May (Rev. J. E. Beckerlegge, A. G. Parsons *et al.*); Trewornan Bridge, R. Camel, 7th June (F. R. Smith).

Devon: Kingsbridge Estuary and Bowcombe Creek, 14th-21st May (D. R. Edgcombe, R. H. Stephens).

Sussex: near Rye, 16th-17th May (D. Cooke, J. R. Thompson); Pett Level, 19th May (R. Cooke, E. Giles *et al.*); almost certainly one individual.

Co. Cork: near Clonakilty, first few days May (B. O'Regan); Aghadown, near Skibbereen, 8th-23rd May (B. O'Regan); near Courtmacsherry, end May (B. O'Regan); probably all one individual.

It is of interest to bear in mind that before 1952 the Little Egret had been recorded in Great Britain and Ireland on only some twelve occasions. Since then, however, there have been something like three to six records nearly every year. There is no longer any suggestion (*cf. The Handbook*) that they are likely to have escaped from captivity. Such observations are always listed as *E. garzetta*, but it is conceivable that the Snowy Egret (*E. thula*) of North America might cross the Atlantic occasionally, particularly as the Little Egret is known to have done so the other way at least twice. The two birds, regarded by some authorities as conspecific, are indistinguishable in the field.

Squacco Heron (*Ardeola ralloides*)

Devon: Slapton Ley, 1st-9th June (M. R. Edmonds); Bampton, 17th July (Dr. Ingram, J. L. Maunder, R. H. Webster); may refer to one individual.

These are the first records since the two in 1954 (*Brit. Birds*, 48: 129).

Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Kent: Mersham, near Ashford, immature dead, 10th February (*per* H. E. Axell, Dr. J. M. Harrison, W. S. Nevin); now in Dr. J. M. Harrison's collection.

As previously pointed out (*Brit. Birds*, 47: 353-354), Night Herons are to some extent open to the suspicion of being escapes from Edinburgh Zoo. The history of the colony there has been described in detail by D. F. Dorward (1957, *Scot. Nat.*, 69: 32-36). In brief, it is that in 1936 six birds, presumably of the North American race *N. n. hoactli*, were obtained from Canada and kept unpinioned in a roofed aviary. Breeding took place in 1938 and has done so every year since. Another pair was imported from Canada in 1946 and by that time some 27 birds were present. In December 1950 the aviary fell into disrepair and a few escaped. In May 1951 the roof was removed and the colony was free. The number of birds at that time was 18, ten having been exchanged. In January 1955 there were 20

adults and four juveniles. It is not known how many have gone away over the years, but a number remain unaccounted for when compared with the average annual increment. There have been several records within a few miles of Edinburgh which presumably refer to birds from the Zoo and a question mark is thus inevitably cast against the increased number of records of Night Herons in other parts of the country in recent years. There were no records between 1930 and 1947, then one in the latter year and one in 1949, followed by six in 1953-54 in various parts of England and several since. On the other hand, a colony of Night Herons established itself in Holland in 1946 (T. Lebret, *Ardea*, 35: 149-156) and this may be the source of the post-war records, particularly as the majority of these have been from the east and south coasts.

Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*)

Cornwall: near Jacobstowe, Bude, first-summer ♀, 11th May, died subsequently (Mrs. F. E. Carter).

Essex: Tillingham, moribund adult ♀, late May (L. H. Symes).

Kent: Yalding gravel-pit, adult ♀, 10th August (W. G. Jarvis).

Somerset: in one locality a ♂ was seen on a number of occasions between 21st June and 1st August, and a ♀ on 18th and 27th July and 12th August (Mrs. M. L. Colthurst, B. Little, D. E. Slocombe *et al.*); near Keynsham, 28th September (A. T. Coote, B. Coote, A. M. Lane).

Angus: near Forfar, ♀, 12th July (R. Middleton).

In the cases of the sight records, the descriptions do not exclude the possibility of the Least Bittern (*I. exilis*) of North America.

Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*)

Kent/Sussex: one, considered moulting from first-winter to adult plumage, frequented the coastal area between Stone Cliff (Kent) and Iden (Sussex), 7th August-14th September (C. W. G. Paulson-Ellis, G. des Forges, D. D. Harber *et al.*).

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

Argyll: Tiree, early October to 26th (Miss M. McKinnon).

Teal (*Anas crecca*)

Co. Down: Downpatrick Marshes, single ♂♂ showing the characters of the Green-winged Teal (*A. c. carolinensis*), 16th February (J. V. Bateman, Miss M. P. McMillan *et al.*), 26th October (Miss M. Bruce) and 2nd November (R. W. Culbert, W. Finlay *et al.*).

Co. Kerry: Akeagh Lough, as above, 23rd November (F. King).

American Wigeon (*Anas americana*)

Inverness-shire: Beauly Firth, immature ♂, 9th October (Miss K. Bryde-Williams, D. I. M. Wallace).

Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*)

Devon: R. Plym Estuary, ♀, 8th November 1958-3rd April 1959 (P. F. Goodfellow, L. I. Hamilton, D. J. Mitchell *et al*).

Essex: Abberton Reservoir, single individuals on 19th January (Maj.-Gen. C. B. Wainwright), 1st-2nd June, trapped (R. V. A. Marshall, Maj.-Gen. C. B. Wainwright), and 7th October (R. V. A. Marshall).

Leicestershire/Northamptonshire/Warwickshire: Stanford Reservoir, Leicestershire/Northamptonshire border, 2♂♂, 15th March (F. E. R. Peach, W. S. Peach); Napton Reservoir, Warwickshire, 2♂♂, 16th March (J. H. Lowe); almost certainly the same individuals.

Sussex: Chichester gravel-pits, ♀, intermittently up to 27th February (Miss W. P. White *et al.*) and again on 20th March (A. B. Sheldon); Pagham lagoon, ♀, 23rd January and 16th February (Major W. W. A. Phillips), thought to have been the Chichester individual; Chichester gravel-pits, ♀, 6th December to end of year (D. Langford *et al.*).

Peebles/Midlothian: Portmore and Gladhouse Reservoirs, 19th October (R. W. J. Smith).

Co. Meath: R. Blackwater between Navan and Kells, adult ♀ shot, 26th January (*per* Rev. P. G. Kennedy).

With the exception of the Devon record, the above occurrences first came to light during the course of the recent enquiry into the status of this species in Great Britain and Ireland, and the Committee have been content to accept them on the strength of their inclusion in G. A. Pyman's paper (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 42-56), in which an attempt was made to assess the extent to which genuinely wild birds may be expected to occur in various parts of Great Britain and Ireland at different seasons. In connection with the Devon record, F. R. Smith has informed us that a female is now known to have escaped from captivity three or four years ago at Ivybridge, only six miles from the River Plym.

Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*)

Devon: Fremington, immature, 28th September (M. Huxtable).

Essex: Abberton Reservoir, adult ♂, 29th October (R. Harkness).

Norfolk: near Norwich, adult ♂, 16th-30th March (M. J. Seago).

Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*)

Co. Dublin: North Bull, immature, 3rd November-20th December (C. S. Holahan, J. O'Mahony, C. F. Scroope *et al.*).

Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*)

Gloucestershire: Slimbridge, adult, 11th February (M. Davy).

Norfolk: Yare valley near Norwich, 19th January (P. D. Kirby, M. J. Seago) and 2nd March (R. E. Hitchcock, R. C. Plowright); possibly one individual.

Kirkcudbrightshire: adult, 17th January-25th February (D. G. Andrew, A. Baldridge, A. D. Watson *et al.*).

These three localities have produced Lesser White-fronted Geese with some regularity in recent years. The Gloucestershire birds are

found with White-fronted Geese (*A. albifrons*) and those in Norfolk and Kirkcudbrightshire with Bean Geese (*A. fabalis*).

Snow Goose (*Anser caerulescens*)

Lancashire: near Southport, adult blue phase Lesser Snow, *A. c. caerulescens* ("Blue Goose"), 19th October-first week December (R. Harrison, F. Moscrop, N. Rowbotham *et al.*).

Aberdeenshire: Loch of Strathbeg, three, 22nd October-late November (Miss E. A. Garden).

Argyll: Appin, 6th November (Miss M. Chisholm).

Perthshire: Kingoodie/Invergowrie Bay, 16th and 18th November (H. Boase).

West Lothian: near South Queensferry, four, 30th November (A. M. B. Maclean).

Co. Wexford: North Slob, adult blue phase, *ca.* 1st November 1957-*ca.* 1st February 1958 when inadvertently shot (Major R. F. Ruttledge *et al.*); South Slob, white phase, first seen 8th December, later moved to the North Slob where it spent the winter (T. J. Underwood *et al.*).

We are indebted to A. Baldridge for informing us that three Snow Geese, two of them of the blue phase, wandered from a collection near Dumfries early in 1958. These are the only escapes reported which could conceivably have any connection with any of the above occurrences.

Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*)

Sussex: near Amberley, 8th-15th February (*Brit. Birds*, 51: 192-193).

Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla*)

Essex: Foulness, an adult showing the characters of *B. b. orientalis*, the eastern Siberian/western Arctic American race which winters in the Pacific and is known as the Pacific Black Brant, 8th February, in a flock of Dark-bellied Brent Geese (*B. b. bernicla*) (P. J. K. Burton, M. R. Chettleburgh, R. M. Larner).

P. J. K. Burton had located this bird in the same area in February 1957 (*Essex Bird Report* for 1957: 12). Enquiries have shown that there is little likelihood that it was an escape.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Argyll: Islay, a small, dark, short-necked Canada Goose, distinctly smaller than the Barnacle Geese (*B. leucopsis*) it accompanied and clearly an example of one of the small races of *B. canadensis* breeding in the North American Arctic, 5th April (J. Shepperd).

Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaëtos*)

In view of continued breeding in Co. Antrim and regular observations in N.W. England, we are only considering records south of 54°N. (and not "outside Scotland"). In Co. Antrim a pair has nested since 1953 (*Brit. Birds*, 47: 272), rearing one eaglet in 1958 (J. A. Benington).

Kite (*Milvus milvus*)

(elsewhere than in Wales)

Cornwall: Launcells, 10th March (E. H. Ware).

Devon: Challacombe Common, 3rd May (R. M. Curber, P. J. Dare).

Kent: Dungeness, 5th April (H. E. Axell *et al.*).

Middlesex: Staines (King George VI) Reservoir, 1st April (R. Adams); Shepherd's Bush, 20th May (E. Simms).

Wiltshire: Chippenham, 13th April (C. Rice).

Yorkshire: Barnsley, 4th March (G. Aynsley); near Arthington, 6th March (D. Ward).

Aberdeenshire: Old Aberdeen, 13th February (Prof. V. C. Wynne-Edwards).

Several other Kites were claimed during the period covered by the above records, but the Committee have been unable to assess the authenticity of these reports owing to lack of supporting details. The impression gained, however, is of a quite exceptional influx during the spring of 1958.

White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaëtus albicilla*)

Norfolk: immature, first seen at Cley late in 1957, reappeared there on 9th, 12th, 15th and 19th January and 4th March; also seen in the Snettisham/Heacham area on 26th January and on several subsequent dates up to 14th February (H. P. Medhurst, R. A. Richardson, J. S. Clark *et al.*).

Suffolk: Havergate Island/Butley, immature, 28th February-2nd March (F. K. Cobb, G. J. Jobson *et al.*); may well have been the bird reported from north Norfolk (see above).

Red-footed Falcon (*Falco vespertinus*)

Dorset: near Wareham, ♀, 21st-24th May (Dr. J. S. Ash, C. T. Bispham, Dr. K. B. Rooke *et al.*).

Norfolk: Whiteslea, 12th and 22nd June (G. E. Bishop, E. Piggin, I. A. Williams *et al.*); Holme-next-the-Sea, immature, 13th-16th September (H. G. Alexander, W. B. Alexander, Miss P. B. Lind *et al.*).

Suffolk: Southwold, ♀, 9th-14th May (G. B. G. Benson, Dr. P. R. Westall *et al.*).

Sussex: near Seaford, adult ♂, 4th May (G. Campbell).

Crane (*Megalornis grus*)

Essex: Earls Colne, adult, found slightly injured 20th February, cared for by the R.S.P.C.A., released 28th February (Inspector Cooper, R.S.P.C.A., *per* G. A. Pyman).

Northumberland: Hadston, near Amble, 29th April-5th May (M. Flanighan).

Suffolk: Waldringfield, a party of five, 9th January; one bird soon disappeared but the remainder (two adults and two immatures) remained until 2nd March (F. K. Cobb, I. J. Ferguson-Lees, A. E. Vine *et al.*).

Caithness: near Westerdale, adult, 12th and 14th June (J. Gunn, L. Salmon).

Sutherland: Lothbeg Point, Helmsdale, adult, 6th August (D. J. Mitchell).

Co. Derry: Lough Beg, adult, shot *ca.* 24th July (*per* H. Dick, A. J. Tree).

The number of Cranes recorded in 1958 was much higher than usual and this very fact supports the impression that at least the majority were wild birds. The picture would not be complete, either, without some reference to the party of 6 which stayed at North Deighton, near Wetherby, Yorkshire, from 17th November to 7th December 1957 (*Y.N.U. Ornithological Report*, 1957: 50). It seems possible that those which appeared in Suffolk a month later were the remnants of this group and, separately or together, the two records provide the first evidence for many years of a party of Cranes wintering in this country.

American Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrula martinica*)

Isles of Scilly: Hugh Town, St. Mary's, immature picked up exhausted, 7th November, died on 9th; now in British Museum (Natural History) (*Brit. Birds*, 53: 145-146).

Little Bustard (*Otis tetrax*)

Berkshire: Compton Down, adult ♂ of Western form *O. t. tetrax* found injured, 28th July, died on 30th (Dr. A. McDiarmid); now in Dr. A. McDiarmid's possession.

Kent: near Tonbridge, 17th October (Dr. J. G. Harrison).

Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)

(elsewhere than on the coast from the Wash to Hampshire and the Isle of Wight)

Glamorgan: Aberthaw, ♂, 7th April (D. Griffin).

Middlesex: Staines (King George VI) Reservoir, ♀, 1st April (J. Cook, Mrs. V. A. Gillham, H. P. Medhurst).

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Co. Kerry: Akeagh Lough, 26th February and 2nd March (F. King); near Blennerville, 20th November-2nd December (F. King).

Dowitcher (*Limnodromus* sp.)

Berwickshire: Hule Moss, 20th and 30th September (S. J. Clarke, Col. W. M. Logan Home, W. Murray).

Co. Dublin: Kilbarrack, Dublin, 19th October-1st November (P. D. Nolan, J. O'Mahony, G. B. Ryan).

Co. Kerry: Blennerville, 3rd December (F. King).

Two species of dowitcher are now recognised—the Short-billed (*L. griseus*) and the Long-billed (*L. scolopaceus*)—but insufficient details were noted in these cases to enable the birds to be specifically named in retrospect. It is expected that a statement on the subject of the two dowitchers will be published before long in this journal. Meanwhile, however, it is perhaps worth adding now that the points to note

particularly are the type of markings on the flanks and under tail-coverts, the call and the relative length of the bill in relation to the head.

Great Snipe (*Capella media*)

Gloucestershire: Slimbridge, 28th January (B. King).

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*)

Devon: Kingsbridge Estuary, 2nd September (M. J. McVail).

Suffolk: Havergate Island, 25th September (R. J. Partridge).

Co. Derry: Lough Beg, 24th May (A. J. Tree).

White-rumped Sandpiper (*Calidris fuscicollis*)

Devon: Wembury Point, 12th-22nd October (R. M. Curber, P. F. Goodfellow, G. G. Trenerry *et al.*).

East Lothian: Tyninghame Estuary, 12th October (T. Boyd, R. W. J. Smith).

Co. Antrim: Belfast Lough, 9th October (H. Dick).

Co. Kerry: Inch, Castlemaine Harbour, 22nd October (F. King, J. R. Smythies).

Note the closeness of the dates of these four occurrences.

Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*)

Cornwall: Ponsadene, Penzance, 22nd September and following days (Rev. J. E. Beckerlegge); Marazion Marsh, 27th-30th September (G. Allsop, A. G. Parsons); considered to have been the same individual.

Middlesex: Perry Oaks sewage-farm, 20th-28th September (E. E. Green, C. M. Veysey, I. M. Walker *et al.*).

Pembrokeshire: Skokholm, immature, trapped, 26th September (Mrs. K. E. I. Barham, E. Brun).

Co. Kerry: Akeagh Lough, 21st September (F. King).

Co. Wexford: North Slob, 27th September (P. J. Roche, Major R. F. Ruttledge, K. Williamson *et al.*).

Note that all these birds were seen within a period of seven days.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*)

Fair Isle: 18th September (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones, W. M. Peet *et al.*).

Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)

Cornwall: Hayle Estuary, two, 19th April (K. O. Nash).

Suffolk: Minsmere, 7th-29th June (H. P. Medhurst *et al.*).

Sussex: near Norman's Bay, 15th September (J. H. R. Boswall); Camber/Rye/East Guldeford, two, 20th-27th September, and at least one until 5th October (M. Edelston, G. des Forges, D. D. Harber *et al.*).

Renfrewshire: near Erskine Ferry, 5th October (P. R. Campbell).

Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*)

Anglesey: Malltraeth, ♀, 15th-16th June (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 386-387).

Bedfordshire: near Shefford, ♀, 10th-13th May (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 385-386).

Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*)

Essex: Hanningfield Reservoir, with chestnut axillaries and under-wing coverts, 31st May (M. R. Chettleburgh, S. Hudgell, R. M. Larner).

Only one European species of pratincole is now recognised, the Black-winged Pratincole (*G. nordmanni*) being regarded as a colour phase of *G. pratincola* that is more or less dominant in south-east Europe and south-west Asia (*Ibis*, 98: 161).

Mediterranean Black-headed Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*)

Dorset: Puddletown Down, adult, 1st April (H. J. C. Bridle); Portland Bill, adult, 19th October (R. Chainey, J. A. Wigzell *et al.*).

Co. Durham: Hartlepool, adult, 1st August 1957-9th April 1958 and again 17th August 1958-8th March 1959 (P. J. Stead *et al.*).

Essex: The Naze, adult, 17th August-27th September (J. A. Fowler, B. S. Meadows *et al.*) and 24th October (R. G. H. Cant); almost certainly the same individual.

Hampshire: Southsea, adult, 13th January and 14th, 17th and 21st February (T. E. Brice, R. Brown).

Sussex: Brighton/Southwick, adult, 5th February-26th March (B. A. E. Marr, C. M. James); Rottingdean, adult, 12th October (C. M. James).

Co. Down: Copeland Island, 27th August (M. C. Gray, J. Lyons, A. Rogers).

What are presumably the same birds have appeared annually at the Co. Durham and Essex localities since 1956. The species is now of regular occurrence on the Sussex coast.

White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*)

Carmarthenshire: near Llandefeilog, 8th March (G. R. Tucker); a notably early date.

Lincolnshire: Killingholme, immature, 24th-26th August (R. May).

Lincolnshire/Norfolk: Wisbech sewage-farm, immature, 21st September-7th October (A. Baldridge, J. A. W. Moyes, P. J. Stead *et al.*).

Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*)

Cornwall: R. Amble, 28th-29th May (A. Jeffreys, Miss E. M. Whelan, Miss K. Orr Wilson).

Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

Kent: Dungeness, 2nd May (J. A. Bailey).

Hampshire: Chichester Harbour, 18th May (K. Brown).

Sussex: Langney Point, 20th July (D. D. Harber).

Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

Hampshire: Mudeford, 7th September (M. C. Adams).

Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*)

Somerset: near Weston-super-Mare, freshly dead, 17th October (*Brit. Birds*, 53: 32).

Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius*)

Norfolk: Winterton, first-summer, picked up freshly dead, 6th August (J. Bane *per* G. T. Wilkins); now preserved in the Castle Museum, Norwich.

Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*)

Norfolk: Trimingham, 18th August (R. P. Bagnall-Oakeley).

Suffolk: Minsmere, 21st June (G. J. Jobson, H. P. Medhurst *et al.*).

East Lothian: Dunbar, 11th October (A. Macdonald).

Co. Wexford: Great Saltee, 14th-15th September (T. Ennis, Major R. F. Ruttledge, K. Williamson *et al.*).

Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*)

Kent: Betteshanger, 11th July (J. R. Rose).

Leicestershire: Loughborough sewage-farm, 13th September (R. A. O. Hickling).

Lincolnshire: Gibraltar Point, three, 2nd September (F. Norris, D. Parr, A. D. Townsend *et al.*).

Pembrokeshire: Dale Fort, Haverfordwest, two, 31st May (P. A. Alderson, J. Cooper *et al.*).

Surrey: Beddington, adult, 5th August (B. S. Milne).

Sussex: North Lancing, 19th September (R. J. Wilmshurst).

Roller (*Coracias garrulus*)

Isles of Scilly: Porthellick, St. Mary's, 6th May (Miss M. C. Grundy, Miss M. E. Price); what was assumed to have been the same bird found dead on 11th (R. Symons).

Orkney: Randall/Deerness/Wideford Brae, in various localities between 27th May and 21st July (E. Balfour, Miss M. Traill Clouston, R. Watson *et al.*); probably the same individual.

Co. Kerry: Castlegregory, freshly dead, 23rd May (*per* Rev. P. G. Kennedy).

Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*)

Yorkshire: Spurn Head, 30th November (J. Cudworth, J. K. Fenton, P. Hope Jones *et al.*).

Co. Antrim: Duncrue Street Marsh, Belfast, 22nd-23rd August (H. Dick, A. J. Tree).

Lesser Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella rufescens*)

Co. Wexford: Great Saltee, five 22nd March, one 23rd, two 24th and four 25th (R. G. Pettitt, Major R. F. Ruttledge).

A statement on the occurrences of the Lesser Short-toed Lark will be published shortly in this journal.

Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*)

Devon: Exmouth, 29th December 1958-3rd January 1959 (R. G. Adams, F. R. Smith, W. H. Tucker).

As with other sight records of Crested Larks in these islands, it is

almost impossible to exclude the admittedly remote chance that the bird was a Thekla Lark (*G. theklae*), the very similar species found in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa.

Nutcracker (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*)

Kent: Ashley, 25th December (J. R. Rose).

White's Thrush (*Turdus dauma*)

Fair Isle: 18th September (J. A. Stout).

Black-throated Thrush (*Turdus ruficollis atrogularis*)

Fair Isle: adult male, trapped, 8th December 1957-*ca.* 22nd January 1958 (*Brit. Birds*, 51: 195-197, plate 33).

Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Hylocichla minima*)

Fair Isle: first-winter, trapped, 29th October (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 316).

Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*)

Essex: East Mersea, immature ♂, 12th-13th January and 3rd February (*Brit. Birds*, 51: 275-276).

Thrush Nightingale (*Luscinia luscinia*)

Fair Isle: trapped, 15th-17th May (*Brit. Birds*, 51: 356-357).

Great Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*)

Suffolk: Minsmere, 28th June (F. D. Hamilton, C. K. Mylne, Mrs. N. Mylne).
Shetland: Duringarth, 4th-5th June (L. A. Brown, Dr. W. J. Eggeling, L. S. V. Venables *et al.*).

In neither of these cases does the description rule out the Clamorous Great Reed Warbler (*A. stentoreus*) of southern Asia and Egypt, notably the less rufous race *brunnescens*. The observer faced with the identification of a Great Reed Warbler should also bear in mind that there are other large brown and buff warblers of comparable size to be considered—notably the Thick-billed Warbler (*Phragmaticola aëdon*), which has occurred on Fair Isle (*Brit. Birds*, 49: 89-93), and Gray's Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella fasciolata*), which has been recorded on Ushant, France.

Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*)

Berkshire: Windsor Great Park, 14th September (E. E. Green, P. N. J. Lette, T. Walker).
Hampshire: Farlington Marshes, 6th August (J. Simons); Ashlett, 6th September (J. K. Bowers, J. H. Taverner).
Norfolk: Holme-next-the-Sea, 20th August (A. Dobbs, Mrs. H. Dobbs).

Northumberland: Holywell Ponds, 20th-21st August (M. Bell, D. Howey, Dr. J. D. Parrack).

Sussex: Sidlesham Ferry, 21st September (M. Shrubb).

Isle of Wight: St. Catherine's Lighthouse, 17th August (J. K. Bowers).

Wiltshire: Coate Water, Swindon, trapped, 2nd September (D. Felstead, G. L. Webber).

Fair Isle: trapped 6th September, seen to 10th and on 15th; thought to be only one individual (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones).

Co. Wexford: Great Saltee, 3rd September (J. J. M. Flegg, D. C. Lang *et al.*); 1st/2nd October (P. P. Creed, P. D. Nolan *et al.*).

Melodious Warbler (*Hippolais polyglotta*)

Caernarvonshire: Bardsey Island, three trapped, 5th, 6th and 7th September (R. W. Arthur *et al.*).

Dorset: Portland Bill, two trapped, 17th August (J. S. Ash *et al.*) and 28th August (A. J. Hold, J. H. Morgan *et al.*), and one other seen, 3rd September (R. J. Jackson).

Pembrokeshire: Skokholm, three trapped, 15th August and 9th and 21st September (Mrs. K. E. I. Barham, E. Brun).

Sussex: Holywell, Eastbourne, trapped, 17th August (D. D. Harber).

Co. Wexford: Great Saltee, three trapped, 5th, 9th and 11th September, and one present until at least 16th (J. F. Card, R. A. Card, T. Ennis *et al.*).

August/September 1958 was a remarkable period for this species (*Brit. Birds*, 52: 363-365). In addition to these 13 records of birds examined in the hand, there was one other trapped of which we have not yet been sent details and some at least of the unidentified *Hippolais* mentioned on the next page were almost certainly Melodious Warblers. Before 1954 there were only 7 records for Great Britain and Ireland, but since then systematic trapping at observatories and elsewhere has shown this species to be an annual drift-vagrant in the Irish Sea area and on the south coast of England.

Icterine Warbler (*Hippolais icterina*)

Dorset: Portland Bill, trapped, 1st September (K. V. Edwards, P. Partington *et al.*).

Lincolnshire: Gibraltar Point, two trapped and three others seen, 19th August (C. T. Beverley, H. Hems).

Norfolk: Holme-next-the-Sea, one trapped, probably a second seen, 3rd September (J. S. Clark, P. R. Grant, C. D. T. Minton); Blakeney Point, three (two trapped), 3rd September (R. A. Richardson), and one trapped, 11th September (R. J. Johns, R. A. Richardson); Cley, 4th September (R. A. Richardson); Titchwell, 6th September (D. Holmes, R. J. Johns).

Northumberland: Monks' House, Seahouses, trapped, 3rd September (Dr. E. A. R. Ennion).

Yorkshire: Spurn Head, four trapped, 1st, 5th, 6th and 14th September (G. R. Edwards *et al.*).

Fair Isle: 23rd-25th August; trapped, 4th September (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones).

Isle of May: trapped, 19th August (J. M. S. Arnott, H. K. Larsen); two trapped, 28th August (Miss E. Green, A. Smith).

Shetland: Loch Spiggie, 3rd June (L. A. Brown, Miss I. M. N. Ryan, L. S. V. Venables).

Co. Down: Copeland Island, trapped, 14th-28th September (J. G. Gray).

Melodious or Icterine Warbler (*Hippolais polyglotta* or *icterina*)

Although it is not the Committee's policy to publish records of "probables", it is felt that there is a case for listing observations of birds which were either Melodious or Icterine Warblers, since it is not easy for any but the most experienced observers to separate these two species in the field and since they do form part of the general picture which is one of the aims of these reports. In addition, owing to the way these two very similar species replace each other geographically on the Continent, there is a remarkable "drift-shadow" effect to be seen in the autumn records (recently discussed by K. Williamson, *Brit. Birds,* 52: 364). As a result of this, a yellow *Hippolais* on the east coast in autumn is almost certain to be an Icterine, while one in the Irish Sea is only a little less likely to be a Melodious.

Birds which were of one or other of these two species were reported from Portland Bill (Dorset) on 3rd August (Miss M. D. Crosby, B. King), from Beacon Lane, Kilnsea (Yorkshire) on 25th August (Miss D. Darlow, G. R. Edwards) and from Bardsey (Caernarvonshire) on 18th and 29th August and 8th September (two) (R. W. Arthur *et al.*).

Subalpine Warbler (*Sylvia cantillans*)

Fair Isle: first-summer ♂, trapped, 12th June (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones); ♀ trapped, 13th-14th June (P. Adams, P. Davis, P. Hope Jones).

Isle of May: ♀, 16th and 22nd July, found dead on 23rd (Dr. W. J. Eggeling, A. D. Watson).

Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*)

Lincolnshire: Gibraltar Point, trapped, 3rd September (Mrs. L. Cave, F. Norris, A. D. Townsend).

Lincolnshire/Norfolk: Wisbech sewage-farm, 23rd November (J. A. W. Moyes).

Bonelli's Warbler (*Phylloscopus bonelli*)

Cornwall: Marazion Marsh, 14th September (*Brit. Birds,* 52: 317).

Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*)

Yorkshire: Spurn Head, trapped, 29th October (R. Chislett, R. M. Garnett *et al.*); 25th and 27th November (P. Hope Jones).

Fair Isle: trapped, 10th-12th October (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones).

Pallas's Warbler (*Phylloscopus proregulus*)

Kent: Sandwich Bay, 23rd November (*Brit. Birds,* 52: 317-318).

Richard's Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*)

Caernarvonshire: Bardsey Island, 14th September (Dr. R. J. H. Raines).

Middlesex: Staines (King George VI) Reservoir, 30th April (Mrs. V. A. Gillham).

Somerset: near West Huntspill, 21st December 1958-mid-February 1959 (R. Angles, E. G. Holt, G. Sweet *et al.*).

Surrey: Beddington sewage-farm, 17th-18th April (J. Cook, H. P. Medhurst, B. S. Milne).

Yorkshire: Spurn Head, trapped, 27th-30th November (J. Cudworth, R. C. Parkinson, E. S. Skinner *et al.*).

Fair Isle: 30th September-4th October, and 14th October (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones *et al.*); two separate individuals.

Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*)

Cheshire/Flintshire: Dee Marshes, 4th May (Miss M. Henderson).

Dorset: Portland Bill, 30th August (R. Chainey, D. Rear *et al.*); 11th September (J. V. Boys, N. H. Pratt *et al.*); 28th September (Dr. J. S. Ash, Dr. K. B. Rooke *et al.*); three, 30th September and 2nd October (H. Aitken, C. R. Macdonald *et al.*); 3rd-5th October (Dr. K. B. Rooke, K. D. Smith *et al.*); 9th October (A. B. Sheldon, J. A. Wigzell *et al.*).

Kent: Dungeness, 2nd May (H. E. Axell).

Co. Wexford: Great Saltee, 18th September (T. Ennis, A. J. Tree).

Pechora Pipit (*Anthus gustavi*)

Fair Isle: trapped, 30th September (P. Davis, J. Wilson *et al.*); 5th October (J. A. Stout).

Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*)

Fair Isle: 18th and 20th May (G. Stout, Mrs. G. Watts *et al.*).

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

Dorset: Portland Bill, adult ♂ showing the characters of the Black-headed Balkan race *M. f. feldegg*, 9th October (full details to be published shortly).

Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*)

Fair Isle: ♀, trapped, 30th May-1st June (P. Adams, P. Davis, P. Hope Jones).

Fife: Wormistone Mains, Crail, ♂, 8th June (J. O. Andrew, B. M. Kelley *et al.*).

Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*)

Berkshire: Blewbury Down, adult ♀, 14th August-6th September (L. R. Lewis).

Cheshire: Middle Hilbre, ♀, 10th May (W. B. Clarke, G. A. Johnson, J. Noonan).

Devon: Seaton Landslip, ♂, 1st June (D. E. Paull).

Dorset: Portland Bill, immature, 14th September (Dr. J. S. Ash, D. K. S. Blanchard *et al.*); immature, trapped, 7th-23rd October (Miss M. D. Crosby, D. J. Godfrey *et al.*).

Gloucestershire: near Dursley, 27th May (M. H. Port).

Norfolk: Salthouse Heath, first-summer ♂, trapped, 4th-9th May (R. P. Bagnall-Oakeley, R. A. Richardson *et al.*).

Pembrokeshire: Skokholm, first summer ♀, trapped, 4th June (Mrs. K. E. I. Barham, E. Brun); juvenile, trapped, 3rd August (Mrs. K. E. I. Barham, E. Brun); juvenile, trapped, 29th August (Mrs. K. E. I. Barham, K. Williamson).

Sussex: Portslade, immature, 7th-9th October (B. A. E. Marr, M. H. Port, G. A. Sutton).

Co. Wexford: Great Saltee, ♂, trapped, 3rd-9th May (P. J. Roche, R. G. Wheeler *et al.*); ♀, trapped, 6th-14th May (J. T. Lang, W. E. Waters *et al.*); immature, trapped, 3rd-4th September (J. J. M. Flegg, D. F. Musson *et al.*); adult ♂, trapped, and two immatures, 6th September (J. J. M. Flegg, D. F. Musson *et al.*).

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*)

Isles of Scilly: St. Agnes, trapped, 30th September-12th October (full details to be published shortly).

Rose-coloured Starling (*Sturnus roseus*)

Nottinghamshire: Watnall, adult, 1st September (C. W. Ross, P. I. Vickers).

Isle of Wight: Sandown, adult, 18th October (J. K. Bowers).

Fair Isle: adult, 29th July-10th August; two immatures, 12th September (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones *et al.*).

Shetland: Fetlar, adult, 7th-8th September (R. N. Winnall).

Wigtownshire: Wigtown, adult, 14th-18th August (Miss M. McKinna).

Scarlet Grosbeak (*Carpodacus erythrinus*)

Fair Isle: immature, trapped, 15th September (P. Davis *et al.*).

Co. Wexford: Great Saltee, first-winter or ♀, trapped, 31st August-4th September (J. F. Card, R. A. Card, D. C. Lang *et al.*).

Black-headed Bunting (*Emberiza melanocephala*)

Isles of Scilly: St. Agnes, ♂, 31st August-5th September (C. M. Perrins, Miss H. M. Quick, Miss J. M. Vaughan *et al.*).

Red-headed Bunting (*Emberiza bruniceps*)

Essex: The Naze: adult ♂, 14th September (H. Lilley, C. F. Mann, J. K. Weston *et al.*).

Fair Isle: adult ♂, 29th August (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones).

Inner Hebrides: North Rona, ♂, 25th and 28th June (T. B. Bagenal, D. E. Baird *et al.*).

Red-headed Buntings are now imported as cage-birds into Britain and other western European countries in enormous numbers each year, males outnumbering females by ten or twelve to one. Single birds can be purchased for as little as 7s. 6d. each and a comparison between this figure and the prices of other cage-birds gives some indication of the relative abundance of the Red-headed Bunting in captivity. It is more than likely therefore that the majority of records of this species at large refer to birds that have escaped from aviaries and cages.

PLATE 21. Ortolan Buntings (*Emberiza hortulana*) at typical nest on the ground in good cover, Finland, June 1958. Above, male feeding female as she broods; below, female bringing food to the four young (4-6 eggs are usually laid). The nest is built of grasses and lined with rootlets and hair (pages 173-174) (*photos: Eric Hosking*)

PLATE 22. Ortolan Buntings (*Emberiza hortulana*), Finland, June 1958. The male (above) has greenish-grey head and breast, yellow throat and "moustache", and pinkish-buff under-parts, while the duller female (below) is paler with head tinged brown. Note the deep-based, pink bill and yellow eye-ring (*photos: Eric Hosking*)

PLATE 23. Above, habitat of Ortolan Buntings (*Emberiza hortulana*), Finland, June 1958—an open area of silver birches and conifers with thick ground cover, next to cultivated fields. Below, a tug-of-war over a caterpillar. This female had the usually striking pale wing-edgings almost worn away (*photos: Eric Hosking*)

PLATE 24. Wart-like growths up to 1.5 cm. in diameter on the legs and feet of a female Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*) due to fowl pox virus, Gloucestershire, January 1959 (slightly larger than life size). The right leg was the more affected, with the growths even partially enclosing the claws (pages 174-175) (*photo: R. H. Poulding*)

Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*)

Fair Isle: immature, trapped, 9th September (P. Davis, B. S. Nau *et al.*).

Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*)

Pembrokeshire: Dale Fort, Haverfordwest, 15th August (*Brit. Birds*, 53: 35-36).

Rustic Bunting (*Emberiza rustica*)

Co. Durham: Teesmouth, 7th September (K. Smith, A. Vittery *et al.*).

Norfolk: Blakeney Point, ♀ trapped, 10th-13th September (R. A. Richardson, M. J. Seago, P. H. G. Wolstenholme *et al.*).

Yorkshire: Blaxton gravel-pits, near Doncaster, 14th September (J. Burley, A. E. Platt).

Little Bunting (*Emberiza pusilla*)

Fair Isle: 4th April (P. Hope Jones); two, 15th May (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones); trapped, 23rd September (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones); 3rd-5th October (P. Davis, P. Hope Jones).

Studies of less familiar birds

105. Ortolan Bunting

Photographs by Eric Hosking

(Plates 21-23)

THE ORTOLAN BUNTING (*Emberiza hortulana*) appeared in this series as recently as May 1957 (*Brit. Birds*, 50: 197-200, plates 33-36), but it is our policy to repeat species when we consider that newer photographs have something to add. This series aims to provide informative material that is different from the normal run of bird pictures obtainable in countless publications and so for the most part it does not include the common British breeding species. Repetition is therefore both inevitable and desirable now that over a hundred and twenty different birds have been featured.

In the case of the Ortolan a very full text accompanied the original photographs and the reader is referred to that for the summary of knowledge that we usually try to provide. The nest shown now was found by the writer in Finland on 14th June 1958. The Ortolan and the Reed Bunting (*E. schoeniclus*) are there considered to be the third commonest buntings, after the Yellowhammer (*E. citrinella*)—which

outnumbers them by about ten to one—and the Rustic Bunting (*E. rustica*). The Ortolan occurs in many parts of Finland, including a little way north of the Arctic Circle, but it is commonest in the central west and this nest was in a sandy area of scattered trees and good ground cover at the edge of cultivation not far from the Gulf of Bothnia. As is most usual, it was on the ground and concealed by grasses and other vegetation a few inches high, in a clump of silver birches separating a ploughed field from a rough road. Other details are given on the plates which were obtained on 16th June when the young were about three days old. Twice when disturbed the brooding female left the nest in a "rodent run" posture. I.J.F.-L.

Fowl pox in a Carrion Crow

By R. H. Poulding

(Plate 24)

AT PURTON, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, on 10th January 1959, Mr. D. Huby found a Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*) that was unable to fly. It had extensive warty growths on legs and feet and, in view of the bird's weak condition and the presence of these unusual lesions, it was killed and subsequently sent to me for a post mortem.

On examining the bird I found that it was grossly emaciated, weighing only 347 gm., while there was a loss of sheen from the contour feathers and the wing-coverts were brown to brownish-black. The toes and tarsi, the right more than the left, contained numerous hard keratinised growths varying in size up to 1.5 cm. in diameter and presenting a fronded appearance when cut across. On the right leg these papillomata had coalesced, partially enclosing the claws and extending up the outer aspect of the tarsus to the feathering on the tibia (see plate 24). No other growths were found externally. On dissection the bird proved to be female with complete absence of subcutaneous and visceral fat and showed marked atrophy of liver and intestines. The base of the right lung was slightly haemorrhagic with two whitish nodules, 2-3 mm. in diameter, on the ventral surface. The only other abnormal finding was a small amount of soft cheesy material at the base of the tongue and in the trachea adjacent to the syrinx. Paraffin sections for microscopic examination were prepared from one of the larger papillomata and also from the lung nodules.

The main microscopic features of the papilloma was the enormous proliferation of the epidermal cells which were divided into fronded lobes by bands of connective tissue. The outer layer of cells showed

extensive keratinisation whilst the deeper layers were greatly hypertrophied and contained acidophilic droplets or vacuoles. The lung nodules were non-specific inflammatory lesions in which no causative organism could be demonstrated. Sections of the papilloma were submitted to Professor C. S. G. Grunsell who reported the lesion as a manifestation of fowl pox—a virus disease rarely recorded in wild birds. Doyle and Minett (1927) state that fowl pox in domestic fowl is characterised by (a) wart-like nodules of comb, wattle and skin of head, (b) cheese-like diphtheritic membrane in the mouth and (c) an oculo-nasal discharge. An infected bird may have one or any combination of these, and also the warty growths may occur on the feet and legs. Synonyms for the disease given by these authors include contagious epithelioma, avian diphtheria, roup, canker and bird pox. A similar virus disease has been reported from canaries (Burnett 1933).

Edwards (1955) describes and illustrates multiple growths on the feet, legs and eyes of Dunnocks (*Prunella modularis*) which he trapped and ringed at Halifax. One retrapped five months later showed no evidence of the original growths. In a footnote to this communication Dr. J. G. Harrison is quoted as commenting that the disease, in view of the history, may have been some virus infection probably closely allied to the human wart. Similar wart-like lesions were found on the head of a Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) by Park (1959), but, as the growths had already occluded one eye and also interfered with beak movements, it seems unlikely that the disease would have taken such a benign course as that suggested by the subsequent recovery of the retrapped Dunnock. In neither of these cases was the lesion sectioned so it is not possible to state whether they were due to a fowl pox virus.

I am indebted to Mr. D. Huby for kindly sending the crow for examination, and also to Professor C. S. G. Grunsell, Dept. of Veterinary Medicine, University of Bristol, for obtaining confirmation that the papillomata were due to the fowl pox virus.

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The irruption of tits in autumn 1957

By S. Cramp, A. Pettet and J. T. R. Sharrock

(*Concluded from page 117*)

DISCUSSION

The reasons for the 1957 tit irruption

Lack (1954) suggested that food shortage is the ultimate factor in irruptions and that the proximate stimulus is sometimes this and sometimes a behaviour response to high numbers, as a result of which emigrations may occur before food becomes scarce.

In 1957 there were a number of reports that Blue and Great Tits were more than usually abundant after the breeding season in parts of the British Isles and N.W. Europe. Fortunately, long-term population studies had been carried out on these two species in both England and Holland and these agreed in suggesting the causes of these increased numbers.

A ten-year study (1948-57) of Blue and Great Tits in S. England (Lack 1958) showed that in three broad-leaved woods 76, 55 and 49 pairs of Great Tits bred in 1957, compared with the previous highest figures in the period of 40, 54 and 32 pairs. Similarly, in two pure oak woods, the preferred habitat of the species, 83 and 88 pairs of Blue Tits bred in nest-boxes (plus an unknown number in natural holes) compared with the previous highest figures of 61 and 77 pairs which, it is interesting to note, were in 1949, the year of the previous major irruption. (In two conifer areas the increase of Blue and Great Tits was not so striking and the Coal Tit had been no less abundant in two previous years.) Success per pair, however, was actually lower than usual in 1957, and the high numbers in the autumn were not due to an unusually successful breeding season, but to an unusually large number of breeding pairs resulting from a low mortality in the previous winter (Lack 1958).

In his report on a five-year study of relationships between populations of tits and Goldcrests and their food supply in the pine plantations of Thetford Chase (Norfolk/Suffolk), Gibb (in press) shows that in the winter of 1956-57 the stock of invertebrate food was sustained throughout January and February, when the weather was exceptionally mild, at a level only slightly less than in the autumn, instead of declining sharply at this time as in normal years. Aphids continued to breed prolifically during these two months. The winter began with all species more numerous than usual; and, with the great abundance of aphids in particular, neither Coal Tits nor Goldcrests decreased

perceptibly from October to February. Blue Tits, feeding less on aphids, decreased slowly from September to March, but the eventual breeding populations of all tits in the pines were about twice those of former years. Most of the Goldcrests left unusually early in the spring to nest elsewhere.

In Holland, H. N. Kluyver (*in litt.*) states that breeding Blue, Great and Coal Tits were extremely abundant in 1957. The numbers of pairs nesting and young fledging in five study areas with some 450 nest-boxes are given in Table III. It will be seen that in 1957 all three species showed an increase in breeding pairs, but that only the Great Tits produced more young than in the previous year, though more young Blue and Coal Tits fledged than in 1955. The population

TABLE III—NUMBERS OF PAIRS OF GREAT, BLUE AND COAL TITS (*Parus major, caeruleus* and *ater*) BREEDING IN SOME 450 NEST-BOXES IN FIVE AREAS IN HOLLAND, 1955-57, TO SHOW THE CORRESPONDING NUMBERS OF YOUNG FLEDGED (FIRST AND SECOND BROODS COMBINED)

	Great Tit		Blue Tit		Coal Tit	
	Pairs	Young	Pairs	Young	Pairs	Young
1955	122	897	22	239	9	129
1956	120	1,045	23	296	10	169
1957	248	1,559	34	291	20	156

of Great Tits at one of the sites, which had been surveyed regularly since 1912, had only been as high in two previous years, 1925 and 1941; in 1957 the increase was greatest in the poorer habitats, Scots pine woods, where this species is normally scarce. Kluyver suggests that the extremely high number of breeding pairs might be due both to a fairly successful breeding in 1956 and to the very mild winter of 1956-1957. Breeding success per pair in all three species was lower in 1957 than in the two previous years, agreeing with Lack's findings in England. Kluyver measured the winter population of Great Tits by counting the numbers roosting in the nest-boxes in December and January each year. The figures were 224 in 1955-56, 311 in 1956-57 and only 189 in 1957-58, reflecting both the high winter population in 1956-57 and the high emigration in the late summer and autumn of 1957. He considers that the movements were most probably stimulated by population pressure and both intraspecific and interspecific competition for food.

In Scotland, in another long-term study near St. Andrews, J. M. D. Mackenzie (*in litt.*) states that although he was unable to make a complete survey in 1957 the evidence suggests that Blue Tits were more successful than usual in marginal habitats and this could have accounted for the increase noted in the locality; there, also, the winter

was mild. In Kent, in an area of some 15 acres of woodland (mainly old oak, with a few conifers) C. S. Gerrish (*in litt.*) says that in 1957 there was a considerable increase in the breeding population of Blue Tits, which led to some unusual nest sites being used—open front nest-boxes, old nests of Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*) and Magpie (*Pica pica*), oil drums, and a nest of House Martin (*Delichon urbica*) from which the tits ejected the owners. There was some evidence here that clutch sizes were above normal and second broods more frequent in 1957.

The causes and nature of irruptions are complex and vary with different species. The movements of Blue and Great Tits in 1957 appear to correspond more closely with the pattern described by Lack (1954) than with that outlined by Svärdson (1957). Lack suggested that big irruptive movements might be stimulated by a behaviour response to high numbers and might then occur before food became scarce, whereas Svärdson thought that they were started by food shortage and tended to stop as soon as areas of abundant food were reached (although he pointed out that they might pass over locally good food resources when a cold air mass had released their urge to fly). The high numbers were present in the late summer and autumn of 1957 in many areas, and such high numbers could lead to pressure on food supplies. There is no definite evidence of food shortage or otherwise in the areas they left, though in England a few observers commented on the poor crops of certain foods, e.g. berries, beechmast, seeds, and some insects and larvae, in their districts. It is difficult to believe, however, that the Blue and Great Tits which moved rapidly through many areas in the south of England in the autumn did so because there was then an absolute shortage of food, or that the areas where they were relatively less abundant in winter (e.g. some parts of southern England) offered less sustenance than places elsewhere where numbers were unusually high (e.g. in the north and west). Lack also pointed out that the irrupting birds often seem abnormally restless and excited and that the flocks contain an abnormally high proportion of juveniles. Many observers commented on this excitement in 1957 (which may have been a factor in their readiness to invade houses) and most ringers noted a high proportion of juveniles, whilst the recoveries show that birds of the year are much more likely than adults to move any distance. In the case of the Coal Tit, Gibb (in press) shows that many birds disperse from the pine plantations at the end of the summer before there is any food shortage, and he believes that aggressive territorial behaviour plays an important part in this.

Other points made by Svärdson were that the irruption species studied by him start an annual flight which is stimulated by the same factors as affect ordinary migrants, but that the duration and length of this flight is very variable in different years; at the same time the

tendency to return to the home of the previous year is weak and the breeding range is therefore fluctuating. The species discussed by him, however, are ones mainly dependent on such vegetable food as seeds, berries and buds. Blue and Great Tits have a more varied diet and in their case there is little to suggest that movements of considerable numbers over any distance are an annual event; in fact, as has been shown in this paper, any journey over ten miles is unusual among British birds in normal years. Many Blue and Great Tits did return to the Continent in the spring of 1958 (though few Coal Tits appear to have done so) and, although the numbers were much less than those in the autumn, it is probable that this can largely be accounted for by the lower intensity of observation on the coasts (departures, too, are often less conspicuous than arrivals) and deaths during the autumn and winter; the latter were probably increased as a result of the high population, the large proportion of first-year birds and the cold spells during January-March 1958. The late return dates of some individuals on the coast suggests that odd birds may have remained to breed here, but there are no reports of unusually high nesting populations in 1958.* Finally, in N.W. Europe at least, there appears to be little evidence that the breeding areas of Blue and Great Tits fluctuate to any extent.

Svärdson mentioned also that the direction of flight of invasion species is often mainly west and the tit movements showed this tendency. The central European tits in 1957 appear to have moved chiefly south-west, whereas in N.W. Europe the direction was west and south-west until they reached the British Isles, when they tended to move mainly between north and west. It is difficult to suggest a reason for the northerly tendency in these movements here, which would seem unlikely to lead them to increased food supplies or less severe climatic conditions.

The Coal Tit, in contrast to the Great and Blue, is known to be an irruption species in some parts of Europe. It occasionally passes through E. Prussia in large numbers, often in those years in which Great Spotted Woodpeckers are also irrupting, and movements have been recorded from Sweden, Holland and Italy, whilst in parts of Russia it is a variable migrant (Lack 1954). There are, however, few previous records of such movements in the British Isles (only 1930, 1947, 1949 and perhaps 1921, with odd Continental birds in other years). The 1957 movements were recorded over a large area of N.W. Europe, including Belgium, Holland, N.W. Germany, S. Sweden,

*In 40 acres of dense oakwood at Eastern Wood, Bookham Common (Surrey), the site of a long-term census, the numbers of Blue Tits in the breeding-season of 1958 showed no significant change from the average of 1950-56 (no counts were made in 1957), but Great Tit numbers were only about half those of previous years (Beven 1959).

Finland and the E. Baltic, whilst there was a fall in numbers in Finland in the winter of 1957-58 compared with the previous year. This suggests that, unlike the Blue and Great Tit, birds of this species from N. Scandinavia (Sweden and Finland) may have been involved to some extent, although there are no ringing recoveries to confirm this. Passage of Coal Tits also occurred in Switzerland, some reaching N. Italy and S. France and one being recovered in E. Germany in the following breeding season. There were few reports of returning Coal Tits in Britain and none in N.W. Europe, perhaps indicating a heavy mortality during the winter.*

Other *Parus* species were clearly little involved. We have seen that a small passage of Marsh Tits was reported in Holland and Germany (and Switzerland) and that there were a very few reports of this species on the coasts of this country (as well as some inland increases), but there is no evidence that any crossed from the Continent. Nor does there appear to be any evidence of large scale movements of this species in the past. Movements of Crested Tits were noted only in Holland.

Svärdson stated that Long-tailed Tits invade Sweden from the east in some autumns. Reports of coastal movements in the British Isles are, however, infrequent and the Northern form (*A. c. caudatus*) has been only rarely identified. In 1957 it seems possible that birds from further north in Scandinavia were also concerned, for there was a heavy passage at Ottenby and a few flocks were seen at the Åland Isles, whilst birds apparently of the Northern race were noted near Bremerhaven in Germany. In addition, movement was reported in most countries in N.W. Europe and Switzerland, though in much smaller numbers than the Blue, Great or Coal Tits and up to a month later (October and November). No examples of the Northern form were recorded in the British Isles, but it seems probable that some of the intermediate race (*A. c. europaeus*) did reach our coasts from the Continent.

The paper tearing and other behaviour

We have seen that in the British Isles the irruption coincided with an increase in the long-standing and widespread habit of opening milk-bottles, and with an even more marked rise in attacks on paper, putty and other materials, although little of this behaviour was reported from elsewhere in Europe.† The opening of milk bottles obviously pro-

*Gibb (in press) shows that Coal Tit mortality is density-dependent in the winter.

†Enquiries by Logan Home (1953) produced three cases of attacks on paper outside the British Isles, in France, Germany and the Canary Isles, and our correspondents gave negative replies for 1957, except for attacks by Great Tits on butter and wrapped meat in E. Germany and on putty in Czechoslovakia. Milk-bottle attacks have previously been reported from a number of European countries (Hinde and Fisher 1951).

vided food for the increased numbers of tits, but there is much less certainty about the causes underlying the attacks on paper, etc. Logan Home (1953), whilst drawing attention to the increased numbers of tits in the autumn of 1949, suggested that there was a tendency for paper-tearing to occur more often in dry autumns (September to November). After 1949, although paper attacks occurred on a small scale in most years, there was no major outbreak until the autumn of 1957, when this even larger irruption took place. In 1957, September rainfall in England and Wales was much above average (although rather below average in October and November); from 1950 to 1956 there were a number of years in which the September to November rainfall was well below average and yet no marked outbreaks occurred. It would seem therefore that paper-tearing is correlated with increased numbers of tits, rather than with the dryness of the autumn.

The reason for these attacks on paper is still puzzling. The most simple explanation is that given by Lack (1958)—that in the autumn the Blue Tit strips bark off branches in searching for food and that, owing to its abnormally high numbers, it was unusually short of food in 1949 and 1957. Logan Home was, however, emphatic that the birds were not driven into houses to attack paper because they were exceptionally hungry. His colour-ringed birds began tearing paper immediately after a good meal at the bird-table, and many of his correspondents said that the birds tore paper or other material while ignoring food placed near-by. The observers recording paper-tearing in 1949 were asked if they habitually fed birds and 80% stated that they did, while 22% of the letters received after the radio appeal (in which no specific question was asked on the point) volunteered such information; similarly, in 1957 24% of the correspondents stated, without being asked, that the birds were regularly fed. In 1957, as in 1949, several observers noted that paper-tearing ceased abruptly at the onset of severe weather and during both invasions October and November were the peak months for the attacks. In his studies of the feeding ecology of tits, Gibb (1954) found that it was in mid-winter that food was especially short and competition for it at its severest; he saw most supplanting attacks for food from November to January and more recently (in press) he has concluded that the population of the Coal Tit is controlled by food shortage in winter. In addition, Logan Home noted that the birds did not eat the paper; the scraps were not usually held in the foot or examined, but were dropped immediately. A number of observers confirmed this in 1957-58 and there were no cases of tits being seen to eat things under the paper. The entering of houses did, however, lead to the discovery and eating of such food as butter, chocolates and sweets in a number of instances, though these records were far fewer than the attacks on paper.

Nevertheless, the vastly increased numbers of tits must have led to greater pressure on the supply of food unless this increased in proportion with the birds or unless there is normally a superabundance of it. A parallel increase of all foods is unlikely, and it has already been mentioned that a few observers reported shortages of some berry and nut crops and certain insects. The poor crop of beechmast would affect Great, Blue, Coal and Marsh Tits, as Gibb has shown that all four species feed on it to an important extent in autumn. The mild winter, however, may have led to an increase in the numbers of some insects. Dr. R. Hull of the Rothamsted Experimental Station has pointed out that there were large numbers of aphids on crops in May and June 1957 in northern France, Belgium, Holland and part of W. Germany, as well as in this country (especially S.E. England), and he also believes that the mild winter of 1956-57 was the most important factor responsible (see also Gibb in press). He adds (*in litt.*) that the winter of 1948-49 was also mild and that this was similarly followed by an increase in aphids, though on a smaller scale. Tits, especially Coal Tits, do feed on aphids and he suggests that the high population may have been able to feed successfully on them in the early summer of 1957, and may then have found themselves short of food when aphid numbers dwindled in the late summer.

Tits are catholic feeders and there is no full information on the effect of weather and other factors on their different food supplies in 1957, so that it is impossible to say whether their food was in short supply that autumn, though this is possible and perhaps even probable. The scale of milk-bottle attacks and the severe increase in damage to fruit in Kent orchards (Wright 1959) suggest this. But though the tits which entered houses were often able to obtain adequate supplies of certain food items such as milk, or fats, nuts and bread from bird-tables, they may have still been short of certain kinds of insect food which provide some unknown but essential feature of their diet at this season. Hinde (1953) first pointed out that the movements made by tits tearing paper are very similar to those they make in tearing bark from a twig when searching for insects underneath and Gibb's researches (1954) showed that Blue Tits in deciduous woodland search dead parts of trees mainly in those months of the year when paper tearing is most frequently reported. Hinde, however, thought it highly unlikely that the birds were looking for some specific and essential item of food temporarily in short supply (though his reasons for dismissing this hypothesis are not clear) and argued that paper tearing was simply an expression of the hunting or food-searching drive. Given a certain combination of internal and external causal factors, he suggested, the tits must behave in this way; the behaviour brings "satisfaction" because the internal drive finds expression, even though no immediate biological advantage is gained. He quoted

Gibb's view that there might be a long-term advantage for a species relying on a succession of temporarily (super)abundant food sources, each liable to give out at any time, to continue a general search even in times of plenty to avoid a hiatus between exhausting one food supply and discovering the next.

It is worth stressing again that most of the attacks on paper and similar materials involved entering buildings, mainly houses. Tits are normally reluctant to do this, and it may be that the excitement and crowding in invasion years (or hunger) help to overcome their normal fears. And there is evidence that where tits are free to wander round inside a house attacks on paper are a regular occurrence in autumn. Thus Howard (1956) described how many of her Great Tits indulged in paper tearing, hammering at furniture or ripping upholstery between September and November every year. She referred to it as a "game" or "pastime" and said that it was abandoned by the end of November, when days are short and natural food takes longer to find. This view that tits tear paper not when food (whether general or particular) is in short supply, but when they have ample food and time and energy to spare is not inconsistent with Hinde's explanation. It is supported by another observer (Miss M. R. Robertson, *in litt.*) who has had Blue Tits entering the house regularly for some years. She also finds that some paper tearing occurs every year, between the end of the moult and the first onset of cold weather, and similarly believes that the tits cease then because they are too busy searching for food to have time for "games". She has found, however, that only a small proportion of her Blue Tits tear paper and tentatively suggests that tearing is an intensified form of play, indulged in by a few "rogue" individuals, probably males. This hypothesis needs testing by others who can study colour-ringed tits in such circumstances. F. Turček stated (*in litt.*) that paper tearing was usual in his captive Great and Coal Tits, and Logan Home quoted a number of records of such behaviour by tamed individuals of other species.

The correlation between increased numbers of tits in irruption years and increases in attacks on milk bottles, paper and putty appears to be established. Food seems clearly the reason for the opening of milk bottles (and perhaps putty attacks also, for in most cases the putty was fresh and it may then provide edible oils). There is, however, a sharp difference between those explanations of paper tearing which link it with a general or particular food shortage and those which connect it with an abundance of food that allows time for "play" or the expression of the hunting or food-searching drive. Further research appears necessary to resolve these differences.

The birds other than tits

It is probable that the mild winter of 1956-57 led to an increased

survival in N.W. Europe of many other species besides the tits, particularly the smaller ones which are often particularly vulnerable to hard weather. This seems the most likely reason for the increased coastal movements here of species which are regular migrants in variable numbers, such as Goldcrests, Firecrests and Tree Sparrows. The increases of Dunnocks, Wrens and Treecreepers on the coast and inland, and of Nuthatches entirely inland and Bullfinches mainly so, may also probably be ascribed to the mild winter here (though there are some indications in the case of the Bullfinch that a general increase is taking place in a number of areas in Britain). Reports of these species on the move in Europe were few (Nuthatches and Treecreepers in small numbers in Switzerland, and a heavy passage of Treecreepers at Ottenby, S. Sweden), but the southern and eastern distribution of many of our records makes it not impossible that odd individuals of some of these birds crossed the sea (e.g. the Treecreeper at Dungeness on 10th October).

In the cases of the other four species mainly concerned—Redpoll, Siskin, Jay and Great Spotted Woodpecker—irruption movements are known to occur over parts of their ranges. Whereas in the past the Redpolls involved in the British Isles have been mainly of the Northern or Mealy form (*C. f. flammea*), the movements in 1957 appear to have concerned the British and Central European races (*C. f. disruptis* and *cabaret*). Unusual passage of Redpolls on the Continent was reported only from Holland and Switzerland, and the ringing recoveries and dates of the main movements of this species on our east and south coasts suggest that mostly native birds were involved, or perhaps that some from the adjoining parts of Europe were reorienting themselves after moving here. With the Great Spotted Woodpecker also, previous major irruptions have concerned the Northern form (*D. m. major*) and the reports of movements in the E. Baltic and the Åland Isles suggest that there may have been a small irruption of this race in 1957. Unlike 1949, this form was not identified in the 1957 movements in Britain, and the birds involved were probably natives with, possibly, in view of the more southerly distribution of records and the coastal movements reported in France and Holland, a few from the immediately adjoining areas of the Continent.

Siskins and Jays, like most of the spectacular irruption species, have specialised food requirements in autumn—Siskins being heavily dependent on the seeds of birch and alder (Svärdson 1957) and Jays on acorns—so that food shortage may have played a direct part in their movements. There was also a major irruption of Siskins in 1949 when birds ringed in Sweden and Belgium were recovered in the winter as far south as S. France, Spain and Italy; Svärdson shows that this was caused by a shortage of birch seeds in autumn, after a rich spruce crop in the previous winter had led to an unusually high

breeding population in Scandinavia. In 1957, however, unusual movements were recorded only in S. Sweden and Switzerland (apart from a few on Ushant, France). The passage of Jays in 1957 attracted more attention, with large-scale passage recorded in the adjoining parts of Europe (Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg), whence most of the birds seen here probably came, as well as in the E. Baltic and Switzerland. No definite information is available on the state of the acorn crop in N.W. Europe, but it is probable that the shortage noted in some parts of this country also occurred on the Continent.

SUMMARY

(1) In 1957, increases of Blue and Great Tits (*Parus caeruleus* and *major*), and to a much lesser extent of Coal (*P. ater*), were noted in the British Isles after the breeding-season and were followed by an influx of all three species on the east and south coasts of England in mid-September. The invasion reached a peak in early October, when almost the whole of the English coast from Northumberland to the Isles of Scilly was affected. On the west coast the main movements occurred later, and it is likely that some Continental and many native birds moved between north and west across the country. The coastal influx largely ceased in early November. Blue Tits were the most numerous; in the south Great Tits outnumbered Coal, while the position was reversed in the north. Long-tailed Tits (*Aegithalos caudatus*) occurred in much smaller numbers, mainly in October on the coast.

(2) Winter numbers were above normal in many areas. The return passage lasted from January to mid-May 1958, with peak numbers on the coast (mainly Blue and Great Tits, with very few Coal) in late March and April.

(3) The irruption was marked by an increase in the opening of milk-bottles by tits and an outbreak of paper-tearing on a scale not known here since 1949, as well as attacks on putty, textiles, etc. These attacks were most frequent between October and December.

(4) British-ringed Blue and Great Tits are normally very sedentary, but in 1957-58 the proportion of recoveries more than ten miles from the place of ringing almost doubled, while those of more than thirty miles trebled. Some juvenile tits ringed in summer 1957, and birds ringed on the coast and elsewhere after the irruption began, moved mainly between north and west in the autumn and winter. Recoveries after early March 1958 show return movements mainly between east and south-west. Recoveries confirm that Blue and Great Tits from N.W. Europe were involved in the irruption into Britain.

(5) Similar increases occurred on the Continent after the 1957 breeding-season, and in N.W. Europe as a whole there were marked movements of Blue, Great and Coal Tits in the autumn in many coastal and inland areas; these were mostly between south-west and west, extending to the British Isles and S.W. France. There was a similar passage from central Europe, through Switzerland to S. France and N. Italy. No reports of attacks on milk-bottles or paper were received from the Continent.

(6) It is argued that Blue and Great Tits should be regarded as true irruption species in N.W. Europe. The evidence for previous irruptions is discussed; these may often have been overlooked in the British Isles owing to the difficulty of detecting movements and increases of common species before the present network of coastal and inland observers was established. There is strong evidence that the irruption was due to the high numbers surviving the mild winter of 1956-57.

It may have been caused by a behaviour response to these high numbers before any actual food shortage occurred.

(7) While hunger probably led to the increased opening of milk-bottles, there are two conflicting kinds of explanation for the paper-tearing: one of these links it with food shortage (general or specific) and the other considers that it is the result of an abundance of food allowing time for "play" or the expression of the hunting or food-searching drive.

(8) Increases in other birds are discussed. These included four species that are known to be subject to irruption movements—Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*), Siskin (*C. spinus*), Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*) and Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*). The movement of Jays in Britain was on a considerable scale, involving birds from adjacent areas of the Continent.

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Thanks are also due to the many listeners who responded to the radio appeals. But perhaps above all are we grateful to the observers throughout the country who kept records of the movements, increases and behaviour of these common species and so enabled the nature and extent of the irruptions to be adequately described. Their names are listed below. We regret that space has prevented their records being given in full and we hope they will feel that their labour was not in vain.

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Appendix A (1)—Numbers of Blue, Great and Coal Tits (*Parus caeruleus, major* and *ater*) shown in observatory logs between 11th September and 6th October 1957

		September																				October					
		11th	12th	13th	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th	19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th	26th	27th	28th	29th	30th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Spurn (Yorkshire)	Blue			1		1	12	4	10	4	4							1	2	2	1	65	13	22	24	2	50+
	Great						8		1	6											1	3					1
	Coal				2	2	1	1	3		4									4	1	13	8			3	1
Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire)	Blue	2	2	3	4	3	6	3	6	4	.....		6	20	.....							2	50+	2	.....		200
	Great	1	2								.....		1	14	.....										.....		12
	Coal						2				.....			4	.....										.....		
Dungeness (Kent)	Blue					9	25	5	3	3	3	6	2	20	10	15	5	8	6	3	15	20	15	10	25	20	275
	Great						2	1					1	1		1		2						1	2		50
	Coal				2		1	1	1																		40
Portland Bill (Dorset)	Blue							20+	25+	c15	c15	15+	c10	4+	10	12	c12	c200	460+	c10	c10	c20	c20	12	15	60	100
	Great															1		3	27		1				4	1	1
	Coal						2			1							1		1		1	2	2	1	1	2	
St. Agnes (Isles of Scilly)	Blue																							1			23
	Great	(2 pairs bred; c16 from 28.viii to 17.ix when increase to 22 and none next day; then up to 8 on several days)																						5	5	5	20
	Coal																										60+
Lundy (Devon)	Blue																1	4	3	2	4	3	4	4	c80	c65	30
	Great																		1		1				1	4	
	Coal																					2	3	1	3	3	3
Skokholm (Pembrokeshire)	Blue																					15	8	3	15	2	8
	Great																3					3	1	1	1		
	Coal																					3	1	1			
Bardsey (Caernarvonshire)	Blue																			2+	2+	1+	2+	2+	3+	3+	2+
	Great																					1+	1+	2+	p	3+	1+
	Coal																			3+	3+	c8	3+	2+	p		
Great Saltee (Co. Wexford)	Blue																										
	Great																										
	Coal																										

All the observatories were manned every day except during the periods marked by parallel dotted lines; a complete blank thus means that no birds were recorded although observers were present. p indicates that birds were noted but their numbers not estimated

Appendix A (2)—Numbers of Blue, Great and Coal Tits (*Parus caeruleus, major* and *ater*) shown in observatory logs between 7th October and 31st October 1957

		October																								
		7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	13th	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th	19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th	26th	27th	28th	29th	30th	31st
Spurn (Yorkshire)	Blue	80+	42		6		19	15	5	80+	6	12	12	c150	24	8	7	9	18	12	6	2	3	24	4	1
	Great	5	1				2	1		1		3		40	30	1	4		2	1	2					
	Coal	7	6				2	2	1			30	20	c50	1	3	1	1		4	8	2				
Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire)	Blue	100+	.....																			12	.....			
	Great		.....																			6	.....			
	Coal		.....																			6	.....			
Dungeness (Kent)	Blue	15	15	45	30	5	50	25	10	10	15	40	30	12	8	6	10	10	50	25	50	15	12	4	6	
	Great	20	10	25	20	5	10	25	20	2	4	15	10	2	1			5	5	6	6	6	4	2	6	
	Coal				6		10	10	1			1														
Portland Bill (Dorset)	Blue	300	50	20	73	30	25	60	30	30	.....	50	20	150	50		20		50	6	12	70			50	
	Great	150	40	12	20	30	40	15	10	15	.....	15	10	20	10		6		15	15	10	10			6	
	Coal		2	2	1	2		1	1	3	.....			5	6											
St. Agnes (Isles of Scilly)	Blue	125	200+	70	100	70	50	40	25	(some stayed and 12+ still present 7.xi)																
	Great	40	50	70	50	50	60	50	30	(diminishing number stayed and 12+ still present 7.xi)																
	Coal	20	20	20	25	20	20	20	10	(a few stayed to first week November)																
Lundy (Devon)	Blue	35	12	40	20	c25	15	c20	c20	15	18	5	6	4	4	5	6	.....								
	Great	2	2	10	15	15	10	10	15	10	4	2	2	5	2	5	4	.....								
	Coal	14	8	15	3	30	5	3	4	5	6	1	4	10	6	3	5	.....								
Skokholm (Pembrokeshire)	Blue		4	9	12	16	30	10	25	30	50	9	6	20	12	12	6	4	29	2	1+	.....				
	Great		1	25	11	6	12	5	3	7	15	2	8	16	12	6	4	4	8	6		.....				
	Coal		4	1	2	2	3	3	8	4	10		2	5	4	3	1	3	6	3		.....				
Bardsey (Caernarvonshire)	Blue	c3	c75	20+	15+	c10	c10	5+	c5	c5	c5	1+	5	50+	1+	10+	c10	c10	c10	c10	p	p	10+	.....		
	Great	2+	c15	c5	2+	2+	c5	1+	2	2	2	1+	1+	2+		1+	1+	7	1	1		1	1	.....		
	Coal	1	c120	c3	c25	c10	10+	1+	5+	c3	c3		2+	3+	1	4	c10	5+	10+	c5	p	p	10+	.....		
Great Saltee (Co. Wexford)	Blue			1		2+	6+	.....																		
	Great			10+	12	1		.....																		
	Coal							.....																		

All the observatories were manned every day except during the periods marked by parallel dotted lines; a complete blank thus means that no birds were recorded although observers were present. p indicates that birds were noted but their numbers not estimated

APPENDIX B—THE IDENTIFICATION OF CONTINENTAL TITS

The identification of tits from the Continent (especially from adjoining areas such as France and the Low Countries) is difficult in the field, and even in the hand. Only a few observers felt able to make definite claims of Continental birds in 1957-58 and those willing to express an opinion sometimes differed in the criteria they used. As the evidence from ringing recoveries and the observations in this country and abroad make it clear that Continental birds were involved in the irruption into the British Isles, it is not necessary to examine this complex problem in detail, but two aspects deserve mention.

Some ringers used the wing-measurements of the Blue Tit given in *The Handbook* (Witherby *et al*, 1938) as a means of separating British and Continental races, but as several observers have established that undoubted British breeding birds have wing-measurements in excess of those in *The Handbook* this method must be adopted with caution. During the irruption, however, there were a number of records of measured birds strongly suggesting the nominate race. For example, the *Dungeness Bird Report 1957* (p. 17) gives a summary of the wing-lengths of 208 Blue Tits trapped at Dungeness between 15th September and 17th November 1957, 182 being birds of the year; of these 208, 25 had wings of 67-69 mm. and these larger birds occurred mostly at the peak of the irruption.

Again, though some Continental Coal Tits can be recognised by the clear grey back, this character is of less value for birds from the adjoining areas of Europe, which were the ones mainly concerned in the irruption, for, as Snow (1955) has pointed out, the colour of the back becomes less pure blue-grey and more washed with olive southwards and westwards from Scandinavia, the Baltic and European Russia.

A. Hazelwood (*in litt.*) has suggested that a number of Blue and Coal Tits involved in the irruption in Cheshire and Lancashire and some Blue Tits from Spurn, which he examined, were of Scottish origin. However, we received no observational evidence to suggest any large increases after the breeding season of these species in Scotland, nor of movements from Scotland to N. England, except at Monks' House (Northumberland) where a southerly coasting of Blue Tits occurs most autumns and was not above average in 1957. There are no Coal Tit recoveries which throw light on this, and no distant recoveries concerning Lancashire Blue Tits, but recoveries relating to this species elsewhere in N. England suggest, and in two cases confirm, that some Continental Blue Tits were involved.

Opportunities for co-operation with French ornithologists

By Guy Mountfort

THE PAST FEW YEARS have seen a remarkable increase in the preoccupation of European ornithologists with continental as distinct from local or national ornithology. This broadening outlook has arisen from three causes—the population-pressure of competent observers who are now seeking wider interests, the relaxation of foreign travel restrictions, and the recent availability in nine different languages of a standard illustrated field manual embracing for the first time all the bird species of the European continent. As ornithology is obviously best studied on at least a continental basis this development should be encouraged.

Not unnaturally there is a tendency for the first foreign excursions to be made to the more widely publicised centres, such as France's Camargue, Norway's Dovre Fjell, Holland's Texel, or, more recently, to Spain's *marismas*. This tendency is true not only of the British but also of the rapidly increasing numbers of excursionists from other countries. In consequence serious problems of over-crowding are being imposed on the people responsible for preserving these famous areas as bird sanctuaries, and restrictions on visits have had to be increased. It is to be hoped that British ornithologists will set a much-needed example by reducing the pressure on the established reserves. First priority for restraint needs to be given to the Camargue, where the problem of disturbance during the breeding season has become acute. The purpose of this article is to indicate alternative locations and opportunities which are available for seeing rare birds and for doing valuable field-work in other parts of France.

Ornithologists who travel abroad fall into two categories: those whose primary interest is to add to their "life-lists" and those who wish to make a serious contribution to a particular branch of ornithology. The growing cult of the "life-list" is a fairly harmless modern expression of the collecting urge and is infinitely preferable to the often ruthless collecting of eggs or skins in which our forebears indulged. It cannot, however, be said to serve any useful purpose by comparison with the more constructive ornithological pursuits and may even become a menace through disturbance of rare species. The skill and enthusiasm of the "life-listers" needs to be harnessed to a greater participation in productive field-work. Recent correspondence with French ornithologists confirms that admirable opportunities exist for combining holidays on the Continent (during which

the "life-list" may of course be indulged) with a number of valuable and interesting local studies.

We in Britain are accustomed to the considerable accuracy with which the geographical distributions of our bird populations are known and to the highly organised national census work which is so admirably directed by the British Trust for Ornithology. France is a much larger country and many parts of it are only very thinly populated by qualified observers. Although a few areas have been widely studied for many years,* the breeding and wintering ranges of birds in the greater part of France are still imperfectly known. The French avifauna is rich and varied, particularly in the eastern, central and southern parts, and the countryside offers incomparable opportunities to combine ornithology with enjoyable holiday-making. While the task of compiling and publishing information on a national basis must obviously be the responsibility of the French ornithological societies, qualified British visitors can give important assistance by contributing observations made during their excursions.

Organised field studies in France are chiefly the province of the Groupe des Jeunes Ornithologistes, an active body of keen amateurs which was formed about ten years ago. It has already carried out some excellent national studies, such as the recent Black Redstart enquiry published in its journal *Oiseaux de France*. The Secretary of its "Centrale Ornithologique" is Monsieur F. Spitz, of 129 Boulevard St. Germain, Paris 6, who will be glad to put intending British visitors in touch with the various regional ornithological centres. The senior society is the Société Ornithologique de France, of 55 rue de Buffon, Paris 5; the Secretary-General is Monsieur Robert Etchécopar and its journal, published quarterly, is *L'Oiseau*. The other important national body is the Société d'Etudes Ornithologiques, of 80 rue du Ranelagh, Paris 16; it publishes the quarterly journal *Alauda*, the joint Editors being Professor Henri Heim de Balzac and Monsieur Noël Mayaud. Within easy reach of our ringing enthusiasts is the Cercle Géographique et Naturaliste du Finistère; among its other activities this organises late summer ringing camps on Ushant. Its journal *Penn ar Bed* is edited by Professor Albert Lucas of the Lycée de Brest, Finistère. Mention should be made of the important Swiss society, the Société Romande pour l'Etude et la Protection des Oiseaux, whose interests also embrace France; its very active "Groupe des Jeunes" ringed 19,000 birds in two months at the Col de Bretolet trapping station in 1959. Its journal is *Nos Oiseaux*, edited by Monsieur Paul Géroudet of 13a Avenue Champel, Geneva. All these societies welcome British members, or subscribers to their journals, and would doubtless be glad of co-operation with their own members. Certainly

*An up-to-date list of the regional studies which are available was published last year by N. Mayaud in *L'Oiseau*, xxix: 355-368; this should be consulted.

anyone who proposes to do any field-work in France should become familiar with the journals mentioned. A word of warning is necessary, however. The French ornithological societies have been plagued in recent years by enthusiastic foreign "rarity-hunters", whose sole purpose appears to be to claim new species for France, usually without witnesses or supporting evidence! Such observations are no more useful than they are in Great Britain. A warm welcome will, nevertheless, be given to anyone who treats the occurrence of rare species with the same caution and insistence on substantiating evidence as do the editors of *British Birds*.

The opportunities for British contributions are legion. Many obviously promising geographical features in France, where migration should be observable, have not yet been adequately studied; for example, between the River Loire and the Pyrénées and along the Channel and north-west Atlantic coasts, or on the Mediterranean shores and islands. Even places which have already produced results, such as Ushant and the Cherbourg peninsula, merit repeated visits. (When he lived in France the writer once ringed 196 birds of 26 species in the space of a few hours on the Gatteville light.) Migration can also be observed in many inland regions, such as the mountain passes in the Alpes and Pyrénées and along the valley of the Rhône. Those interested in ecology have available ready-made study areas for judging the changes brought about by the great hydro-electric projects and damming, with its consequent massive destruction of established habitats, for instance on the Rhône and Durance rivers. Remarkably little is yet known about the ecology or distribution of birds in the Massif Central, where a curious mixture of northern and southern species and races can be observed. In this mountainous region the need to study the plateaux and valleys is of course as urgent as the need for high-altitude work. In the Vosges, Jura, Alpes and Pyrénées local observations have already indicated that there are wide variations in the breeding behaviour of birds in places only a few kilometres apart.

One tends to think of excursions to France only in terms of the breeding season, but there are fascinating opportunities for field-work in the autumn or winter. Duck and wader counting can be exciting in the huge inland marshes and pond areas of the south and central regions, many of which have never yet been visited by trained ornithologists. A list of the more important localities is given in Appendix 1(A). As an indication of the richness of bird-life which awaits those who are willing to look beyond the Camargue, visits to the Sologne region during a few week-ends between April and July revealed more than 120 breeding species within ten square kilometres. Similarly, 109 species were seen by the writer in four days in a very much smaller area on the River Yonne.

The altitudinal distribution of birds in the mountains in the southern half of France is still largely unknown, particularly in the Massif Central and southern Alpes. An interesting project might be to define the respective heights at which the Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) and the Black-eared Wheatear (*O. hispanica*) are found. Or to discover whether, as is suspected, the Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*) now breeds in the Savoie. Or to determine the as yet unknown southern limits of the breeding range of Tengmalm's Owl (*Aegolius funereus*) in the Alpes. The puzzling discontinuous distribution of the Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*) and Pallid Swift (*A. pallida*) in southern France would provide another useful task. Those who prefer lowland birds should investigate the little-known ranges of the various herons in the breeding season and in winter. Among the waders there is ample scope: for example the Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) is now known to breed in about twice the number of areas reported in the last published *Liste des Oiseaux de France* and the ranges of few of its relatives are yet accurately known. The Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) almost certainly nests in other areas than those recorded in the Dombes and Vendée. For rarity-hunters who are able to cover a good deal of ground, an admirable project might be to attempt to measure the distribution of the Little Bustard (*Otis tetrax*); it is incidentally not necessary to go very far afield to see these interesting birds, as some are now breeding only half-way between Paris and the Belgian frontier.

More restricted tasks would be to find the northern limits of the Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) and Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius*) in the Lower Rhône and Durance areas, into which these easily identified species are now spreading. Those who visit Alsace (a wonderful centre for tourism) might like to verify the suspected breeding there of the Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa parva*)—see Appendix 2(c). Specialists in the birds of prey, or those who enjoy mountaineering, would find plenty to do in trying to obtain evidence of the breeding of the Lammergeier (*Gypaëtus barbatus*) in the Pyrénées. Those who prefer more intricate identifications could try their hands at disentangling the confusing over-lapping ranges of the host of *Sylvia* warblers which inhabit the Massif Central.

It is evident that many considerable changes in distribution are taking place in France. Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*) is now found north of Paris; the Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) is rapidly pushing westward from the north-east; the Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) is as speedily extending its breeding range southward and the Jackdaw is multiplying fantastically; the Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) and the Serin (*Serinus canarius*) are spreading westward in Bretagne and Normandie; the Subalpine Warbler (*Sylvia cantillans*) appears to be moving north; the Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*) is taking advantage of changes in afforestation to spread westward, as is the

Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*); and the Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) is moving into the centre of France from the east. All these changes require accurate quantitative assessment.

From the viewpoint of variety the most interesting mountainous or forested *départements*, and the least known, are the following: Isère, Hautes- and Basses-Alpes, Alpes-Maritime, Var (particularly the interior), Vaucluse, Drôme, Ardèche, Lozère, Tarn, Aveyron, Cantal, Corrèze, Aude, Ariège and Hautes- and Basses-Pyrénées. In Appendix 1(B) will be found a reference to certain mountainous regions about which ornithological information is almost or completely lacking. For water-birds the following *départements* are particularly recommended: Morbihan, Loire-Atlantique, Charente-Maritime, Vendée, Gironde, Landes, Indre, Haute-Saône, Haute-Marne and Hérault. Corsica, one of the gems of the Mediterranean, has been surprisingly neglected by ornithologists and nobody has yet attempted a serious study of two rare species which occur there—the Corsican Nuthatch (*Sitta whiteheadi*), which is known to nest in some forests, and Eleanora's Falcon (*Falco eleonorae*), which perhaps breeds. On the writer's last brief visit the island was swarming with migrants, but very little organised work on migration has yet been done there.

Visitors to the south of France should perhaps be warned of two factors which frequently cause confusion. The first is the great brilliance of the sunlight, which plays tricks on eyes accustomed to the colour values in our relatively pale northern light. This is a particular problem with the many species of larks and chats, which in any case tend to pick up the red or yellow colours of the dusty ground in Provence. Gulls can also be very perplexing in the unaccustomed light. Many British visitors find it difficult to evaluate the colour distinctions between the Mediterranean race of the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus michahellis*) and the darker British race of the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus graellsii*). The second factor which often confuses visitors to the south is the very long period embraced by spring migration. Finding the scrub of Provence in May alive with Pied Flycatchers (*Muscicapa hypoleuca*), or Redstarts (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*), they are inclined to record them as "common in suitable habitats", without realising that they are only resting migrants. It is commonplace to see migrating swallows or terns still passing through while the local birds are already on eggs or even feeding young. A visitor to the Mediterranean in June may not give a second glance to what he assumes to be the familiar Common Gull (*L. canus*), unless he realises that at this time of year he is much more likely to see a Slender-billed Gull (*L. genei*). In other words nothing should be taken for granted at this, or indeed any, time of year and until more detailed information is available from France the distribution maps in the *Field Guide* should be taken only as a general indication. It should,

however, be noted that the maps in the latest French edition of this book are more accurate in respect of France than those in the earlier British and Continental editions.

Many British ornithologists have, of course, made excursions in France, but unfortunately few of them have made their notes available to the local ornithological societies. It will be of advantage to all if in future the need for international co-operation is recognised. In all cases the information should be presented in complete form, with scientific names, map references, altitudes, descriptions of habitats and so forth. However, because of the menace of unscrupulous egg-collecting, the exact localities in which rare breeding birds are found should not be given in any published report. Completed nest record cards will be particularly welcomed by the Groupe des Jeunes Ornithologistes. Mere lists of species observed, without other details, are of course of very limited interest.

The writer is indebted to Monsieur Raymond Lévêque and Monsieur F. Spitz for their valuable help in the preparation of this article.

APPENDIX I—AREAS IN FRANCE WHICH SHOULD PARTICULARLY REPAY STUDY IN THE BREEDING-SEASON

The localities in A that are marked with asterisks, as well as all in B and C, are ones about which little or no ornithological information has yet been published. Names of *départements* are shown in italics.

(A) *Marsh and pond areas*

*Valleys of rivers Somme, Canche and Authie (*Somme* and *Pas-de-Calais*)
*Ponds between Arras and Denain (*Pas-de-Calais*)
*Ponds of the Argonne from Ste. Menehould (*Marne*) to Bar le Duc (*Meuse*)
Ponds of the Champagne Humide between St. Dizier (*Haute-Marne*) and Troyes (*Aube*)
Valleys of Champagne, notably the various heronries of the rivers Seine, Marne, Aube and Oise, and their tributaries
*Ponds of the Woevre from Damvillers (*Meuse*) to Toul (*Meurthe-et-Moselle*)
*Ponds and lakes of *Moselle*, particularly to the west of Sarrebourg
Forest areas bordering the Rhine in Alsace (*Bas Rhin and Haut Rhin*)
*Bogs and ponds south of the Vosges between Le Thillot (*Vosges*) and Lure (*Haute Saône*)
Swampy depressions throughout *Manche*
*Marshes of the Brière near St. Nazaire and the Lac de Grand'lieu (*Loire-Atlantique*)
Peat-bogs and ponds of Sologne (*Loire, Loir-et-Cher* and *Cher*)
Ponds of the Brenne to the east of Le Blanc (*Indre*)
Ponds of the Bourbonnais around Moulins (*Allier*)
*Ponds of the Bresse between Châlons-s-Saône (*Saône-et-Loire*) and Lons-le-Saulnier (*Jura*)
Poitevin marshes east of Niort (*Deux-Sèvres*)
*Marshes between Rochefort and Royan (*Charente-Maritime*)
Ponds of the Plaine du Forez north of St. Etienne (*Loire*)
Ponds of Dombes between Lyon (*Rhône*) and Bourg-en-Bresse (*Ain*)
*Ponds west of Champier (*Isère*)
*Ponds, marshes and bogs of the Landes (*Gironde* and *Landes*)

*Coastal ponds from Port Vendres (*Pyrénées-Orientales*) to the Camargue (*Bouches-du-Rhône*)

(B) *Mountainous areas*

Almost all the Massif Central (except the periphery and a few localities such as Causses, Forez and Mont-Dore) and the southern half of the Alpes. Very few and strictly local studies have been made in the Pyrénées, Corbières, the northern half of the Alpes and other mountain ranges.

(C) *Coastal areas*

Information on coastal breeding species is only fragmentary in *Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Somme, Vendée, Charente-Maritime, Gironde, Landes, Pyrénées-Orientales, Aude* and *Hérault*. Other coastal regions have been documented in only a few localities.

APPENDIX 2—SPECIES IN FRANCE ABOUT WHICH DATA ARE ESPECIALLY NEEDED IN THE BREEDING SEASON

(A) *Breeding areas almost unknown except in very few places*

Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*)
Baillon's Crake (*P. pusilla*)
Little Crake (*P. parva*)
Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*)
Pied Flycatcher (*Muscicapa hypoleuca*)
Collared Flycatcher (*M. albicollis*)
Ortolan Bunting (*Emberiza hortulana*)

(B) *Limits of breeding ranges unknown*

Teal (*Anas crecca*)
Short-toed Eagle (*Circaëtus gallicus*)
Little Bustard (*Otis tetrax*)
Snipe (*Capella gallinago*)
Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)
Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius*)
Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)
Pallid Swift (*Apus pallidus*)
Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*)
Roller (*Coracias garrulus*)
Grey-headed Woodpecker (*Picus canus*)
Middle Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos medius*)
Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*)
Calandra Lark (*Melanocorypha calandra*)
Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella cinerea*)
Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)
Willow Tit (*Parus atricapillus*)
Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)
Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*)
Marsh Warbler (*Acrocephalus palustris*)
Melodious Warbler (*Hippolais polyglotta*)
Icterine Warbler (*H. icterina*)
Orphean Warbler (*Sylvia hortensis*)
Lesser Whitethroat (*S. curruca*)
Subalpine Warbler (*S. cantillans*)
Dartford Warbler (*S. undata*)
Bonelli's Warbler (*Phylloscopus bonelli*)
Willow Warbler (*Ph. trochilus*)
Firecrest (*Regulus ignicapillus*)
Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)
Tawny Pipit (*A. campestris*)
Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*)
Lesser Grey Shrike (*L. minor*)
Woodchat Shrike (*L. senator*)
Red-backed Shrike (*L. cristatus collurio*)
Rock Sparrow (*Petronia petronia*)

(C) *Suspected but not proved to breed in the localities indicated*

Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) in Normandie and Bretagne
Osprey (*Pandion haliaëtus*) in the Ardennes and Lorraine
Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) on the estuary of the Loire and the Lac de Grand'lieu
Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) in north-east France (only one known locality)
Goosander (*Mergus merganser*) around the larger Alpine lakes
Slender-billed Gull (*Larus genei*) on the Mediterranean coast
Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa parva*) in Alsace
Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) in eastern France
Barred Warbler (*Sylvia nisoria*) in Lorraine and Alsace

Notes

Unusual death of Swift.—On 10th July 1959 a Swift (*Apus apus*) was brought to me completely covered with a mineral oil; despite careful efforts at cleaning it, it soon died. This bird had been picked up on the large playing field at Southfields County Secondary School at Gravesend, Kent, early that afternoon. The circumstances leading to its death provided something of a puzzle until I was reminded that a helicopter had been spraying crops adjacent to the playing field during the preceding days. Enquiries at this farm revealed that the type of spray in use had been copper sulphate, on potatoes. This is a non-oily solution but the ground on which the helicopter had been landing showed considerable fouling by oil, probably as a result of some leak. It seems reasonable to assume that the rotating blades of the helicopter had fanned this oil over a large area and so resulted in the complete coverage of this unfortunate bird. R. G. FINNIS

Swallows taking winged insects from the surface of the sea.—For at least an hour on 13th September 1958, a calm and sunny day, I watched a small party of Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) feeding on large numbers of winged insects which had blown on to the surface of the sea at Tresco, Isles of Scilly. Invariably each bird momentarily broke the surface of the water as it swooped down to take an insect and it seemed that they must be swallowing a small amount of salt water every time. I therefore carefully watched individual birds and found that some of them were feeding persistently in this way.

BERNARD KING

Request for information

Field investigations of the B.T.O.

Road deaths.—The objects of this new enquiry of the British Trust for Ornithology are to discover (a) approximately how many birds are killed in one year on the roads of Britain and which species are the chief victims, and (b) whether there is a peak at any one season and if the species vary with the time of year. Regular surveys of given stretches of road, preferably at least once a week, will be the most useful, but this does not exclude those who are not able to make observations over the full year, e.g. teachers and children whose journeys lapse during the holidays. The most complete data are likely to be provided by pedestrians and cyclists, but motorists who have time to spot and examine remains can also help. The enquiry will start on 1st May 1960 and continue until 30th April 1961. Full details may be obtained from the organiser, Miss T. Gompertz, Woodway, Pinner Hill, Middlesex.

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